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KASHMIR

Women Empowerment & National Conference

SHAHZADA AKHTER

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Dedicated
to
NEW KASHMIR

Publisher's Submission

I am highly indebted to my revered father Sheikh Ghulam Muhammad, scion of an illustrious and noble family of publishers and printers of Kashmir valley, for introducing me to a trade which was to him a life-time passion and which, in turn, has become my only passion and identity. Whatever our family stands for is the outcome of a long, strenuous and continuous struggle to help create among our Kashmiri brethren a desire for learning, an urgency to enter the world of wisdom through books and curiosity for knowledge.

It is no exaggeration to claim that ours was the concern which worked solicitously for the preservation, printing and publication of manuscripts which were otherwise fast deteriorating, unattended and unread in various dark dingy and damp sites in Jammu and Kashmir. We brought them to light and made the world aware of, and more responsive to them.

My grandfather Sheikh Abdul Gaffar is accredited with the introduction of publication and printing of books in Kashmir valley way back in the early days of twentieth century by an arrangement with the Lahore Steam Press run by Hafiz-ullah. From his Book House at Chattabal in Old Srinagar city which during those days was the hub of business and intellectual activities in Srinagar, he initiated printing and publication auspiciously with

Aurad-i-Fatiha and *Aurad-i-Qadriya*. But before my grandfather could consolidate his flourishing trade and introduce it to his son, he passed away.

My father who was yet uninitiated to an unordained world of books, had to bend his back to continue with the most sacred job of his life. He soon found Chattabal too small for his expanding work and established the concern 'Sheikh Ghulam Muhammad & Sons, Tajran-e-Kutub' at Maharaj Ganj Srinagar. What followed was the further expansion of his love for books in the form of well known publishing house 'Haji Sheikh Ghulam Muhammad and Sons' at Maisuma Bazar, Budshah Chowk Srinagar.

Sheikh Ghulam Muhammad considered publication of books a sacred duty, a national obligation and a service to mankind. He was the president of 'Kashmir Book Sellers and Publishers Association' till his death in February 23, 1999 which was mourned by millions of Kashmiris.

As a lesser mortal and a man of humble ambitions, I have also dedicated my life in the service of men to facilitate their urge to know more and learn more and thus help them achieve the most cherished goals of learning and knowledge in their lives.

The present publication is also a part of our endeavor to continue with those traditions laid by my grandfather and thus reach to the broader world of book-lovers.

We highly thank our well wishers and readers and assure them that we would never allow ourselves the comforts of rest till we achieve our objective - the dissemination of knowledge in Kashmir.

Have trust in us and let us have your good wishes.

Publisher

Acknowledgement

I owe my greatest debt to Prof. Dr Asifa Jan for her inspiring guidance. I am also indebted to Prof. Noor Ahmad Baba and Prof. Gulshan Majeed for their useful suggestions during the preparation of this book.

I fail if I do not sincerely acknowledge the Foreword by Prof. Bashir Ahmad Dabla who needs no introduction as his contribution is known to everyone in the discipline of Social Science. I am also thankful to Sheikh Nazir Ahmad, General Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, for writing the Afterword for this book.

My thanks are due to my Spouse, Javid Ahmad, for everything - and besides that for being a great friend. I would also like to thank my family especially my brother, Sajad Hussain and all my friends for their love and support in this attempt.

I would also like to express my thanks to the entire team of JAY KAY BOOKS, publisher of this book, especially to Mr. Sheikh Bashir Ahmad, for publishing this book in a professional manner and in highest possible standard and quality.

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I warmly welcome all the suggestions and criticism from the readers of this book.

Foreword

As was the case with other societies, the women in the traditional Kashmiri society in pre-modern times suffered in all fields of life especially economic, social, cultural and political fields. This static situation could not be changed till the impact of many national and international developments reached Kashmir in the late-Nineteenth-early 20th century. These developments, characterized by the author as *neubremization* (see the Author's book entitled "Working Women in Kashmir, New Delhi: 1982) generated the historical forces which led to the evolution of 1931 movement in Kashmir. In actuality, this mass political movement which represented the first politically organised and directed movement for total emancipation of Kashmiri Muslims in the period of last 400 years of alien rule, was caused by indigenous factors [such as despotic rule, un-paralled poverty, forced labour, social-cultural subjugation] and exogenous factors [such as increasing impact of Indian National Congress led freedom movement in India and 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia]. In this politically determined environment, women in Kashmir specifically experienced emancipatory effect in theory as well as in practice. In theory, the sole political force led by the National Conference [NC] upheld the ideas and ideals of Women's equality in totality. The Naya Kashmir Programme which is still considered the first

radical programme in the entire Indian sub-continent, made special emphasis on women equality and talked about their political rights especially the political participation. In practice, the NC involved all sections of society especially women from the Lower classes in the freedom movement of Kashmir. Thus, it gave them a significant and leading role in society and politics. In this process till 1947, it prepared the ground for women's emancipation-empowerment in the J & K State.

After 1947, the NC took up the cause of the women seriously, systematically and continuously. The introduction of Radical Reforms like Land to the Tiller [with successful implementation] abolition of Usury system and free education for all from primary till University stage, had direct important impact on the processes of empowerment in Kashmir. Its government took other modernization and development programmes and schemes in order to establish the women's proper role and status in the society. Consequently, the literacy of women in J & K increased up to 47 per cent in 2001, all professional, technical, skilled and modern super-speciality fields were allocated to women. A significant number of these educated women were employed in various economic sectors. They were also exposed culturally and emancipated socially. Politically, they were given significant positions in all parties/organizations in all areas, in all classes/communities and in all regions and sub-regions. They also maintain certain important administrative headships and become the leaders of the political parties and organizations.

The credit of all this situation of emancipation and empowerment of women in Kashmir goes to the NC leadership, especially Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah

and his wife Begum Akbar Jahan. In fact, Begum Sahiba who partly belonged to a community which is still backward in many fields of human life played direct and indirect role in the emancipation of Kashmiri women. While she helped and encouraged Sheikh Saheb to initiate reforms/ measures for total change and development of women in Kashmir, she herself started social initiatives to carry out this mission. In this connection, she is remembered to start several institutions, programmes and measures for women in the State. She established Women Welfare Trust, known as the J & K Markaz-i-Behbodh-i-Khawateen, Nowpora Srinagar, in 1975 for the overall welfare activities of Kashmiri women especially belonging to lower socio-economic background and rural-hilly backward areas. Besides imparting training in different arts and crafts, the Trust operates a girls Hostel for working professional ladies, special hostel for Gujjar and Bakarwal girls and orphanage called Gulzar-i-Itfal. The trust also intends to take care of the victims of the violence of Kashmir Valley during last twenty years.

All the preceding developments related to the role of women in Kashmir through a popular political party, JKNC, have been explained and analysed in the academic framework by Miss Shahzada Akhter in her book entitled "Kashmir: Women Empowerment and National Conference". This academic effort represents a scientific and scholarly study about the role of NC leadership in the process of emancipation and empowerment of women. In the introduction of the book, the Author deals with the conceptual aspects related to women empowerment in general and in Kashmir in particular. The first chapter concentrates on a general overview of the prevailing conditions of women especially social and political status.

While the Second chapter deals in women in Indian Society [especially change among them in the historical context and in their contemporary situation], the third chapter focuses on Women in Kashmir Society [especially in the historical context and their role in various socio-political movements]. The historic role of NC in the emancipation-empowerment of women in Kashmir, before and after 1947, stands as the main theme of the fourth chapter. The relevant portions of Naya Kashmir Programme have become a case of specific study. Finally, in the last chapter the Author has objectively assessed the role of NC leadership in the process of emancipation, particularly in the background of famous radical reforms. She has also surveyed some legislative actions in this regard, especially Dowry Restraint Act, Desolation of Muslim Marriage Act, Panchayati Raj Act and Legal Services Act. Moreover, she has studied the objectives, functions and impact of Madre Meherban Women and Child Welfare Institute in Srinagar. She gives the credit of all these activities to Begum Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah. Finally, she concludes the study by associating all these activities to the vision and mission of the NC leadership. I hope that the book will help in understanding the broader process of change and development among women in Kashmir before and after 1947. However, I feel that some degree of change and development has positively been experienced by Kashmiri women, while majority of them still lack most of the basic facilities of human development which should be taken care in future by the NC leadership.

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Preface

Women are an integral part of the social structure throughout the world. They are the social conscience of a nation and their contribution to society and humanity is great. But, throughout the globe, women form a weaker section and are under the supervision and control of men-folk in all walks of life. They are at the receiving end of much socio-political ill-treatment, harassments and are driven out of the mainstream of politics. In spite of a series of formal and informal efforts aimed at uplifting them, they are still in the dark and are forced to continue in this age old 'deprived' condition. Hence women's cause draws worldwide attention and accordingly discussions, debates etc are going at various levels, among the public, academic and policy makers so as to ameliorate their backward status and lend them dignity and self-respect.

The emergence of the feminist movements launched struggles against these social inequalities and gender discriminations. Feminism must not be anti-men. The focal point of resistance must be against male abuse of power and the subjection of women to the personal satisfaction of men. Thus, the aim of feminism is to empower women. But, it must be remembered that empowerment does not mean to dominate others; it is a way to achieve the due and respectable place for women in society. Women empowerment is, not to

favour or pity women but to provide them equal opportunities so that they can make their identity as human beings—equal partners of men and not as the 'second sex' or subordinate to men. If any injustice is done to any partner (man or woman), there will be imbalance in the whole system of society.

The book purports to investigate the discrimination between men and women and process of empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir with a special reference to the role of J&K National Conference, the first political party of the State. The methodology used for the study is historical and analytical in nature. No such research has so far been conducted on the topic **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: ROLE OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE**. The first aim of the study is to build a comprehensive and authentic account of conditions and status of women in Jammu and Kashmir and the role that National Conference played in empowering them. The collection of data and facts through the administration of questionnaire and interviews has given the methodology a tinge of empirical investigation. These facts therefore have been properly processed and presented to their right context. Both the primary and secondary source materials of investigation, including official reports, publications, constitutional documents, newspapers and the like have been used to present a factual picture of the situation.

The study has been divided in six chapters.

Chapter I attempts to give a brief review of the conditions and status of women, in general, at present.

Chapter II gives a brief review of the conditions and status of women in India along with a brief discussion of women movements in India.

Chapter III gives a brief account of position and

conditions of Kashmiri women since earlier times till date. It includes the impact of Christian missionaries and Freedom Struggle on women in Kashmir.

Chapter IV deals with historical background of Jammu and Kashmir and the struggle for freedom by people in 1931. The need for accommodating the people under an organization and the causes for transformation of Muslim Conference into National Conference with a critical analysis of Naya Kashmir Manifesto, the main ideology of the National Conference and the document on which the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir is based.

Chapter V deals with the role of the National Conference in women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir. It also gives a brief account of schemes and reforms done by the National Conference.

Chapter VI sums up the main ideas of the study and gives a few suggestions for achieving the goal of women empowerment.

Introduction

Woman constitutes the target, the object, the stake of a masculine discourse and debate among men. Within the discourse, 'woman' has been misinterpreted, forgotten variously, frozen in show-cases, rolled out in metaphors or simply buried beneath carefully stylized figures.

Woman has often been dominated by an intent, a meaning, a thought; in other words, by the laws of a language constructed by man. In fact, 'woman' has been trapped in such a system which serves the auto-affection of masculine subject. In the words of George Granville "Of all the plagues with which the world is curst, of every evil, a woman is the worst".

A well known Chinese proverb reads as, "The three virtues of woman are to obey the father, to obey the husband, to obey the son".

Even an intellectual like Chanakya* in his Chanakya Niti Shasta has downgraded the status of a woman and trapped her into being an object of subservience, which is evident from these following verses:

"Untruthfulness, rashness, guile, stupidity, avarice, uncleanness and cruelty are a woman's seven natural flaws."

[Verse 1, Chapter 2]

"A women does not become holy by offering, by charity, by observing hundreds of fasts, or by sipping sacred water, as by sipping the water used to wash her husband's feet"

[Verse 10, Chapter 7]¹

Contradictory to these common beliefs, Woman enjoys a special status and protected rights in almost all religions.

Islamic Law (Shari', at) provides an iron cover around a woman against all sorts of exploitation and safeguards her from being instrumental in the hands of men. Needless to say that most of our societies, including societies in the Muslim world are practically male-dominated.

It is commonly believed that Islam does not admit equality of sexes and consequently a woman is denied her due in the society. But, nobody can deny the fact that Islam was the first to raise its voice against the oppression and exploitation of woman and accorded her a place of dignity and honour in the society. It was loudly proclaimed:

O mankind! Reverence
Your guardian lord,
From a single soul
Created, of like nature
His mate, and from them twain
Scattered (like seeds)
Countless men and women:
Reverence God, through whom
Ye demand your mutual (rights)
And reverence the wombs
(That bore) for God
Ever watches over you.

It was an announcement that the man-made discrimination between one man and the other, between men and women is false, absurd and baseless. The mankind is the offspring of the single human soul. Originally all have the same descent. All are equal and enjoy equal position. Any kind of distinction between them on the grounds of family status, race, colour, tribe etc. is null and void.²

Christianity highlights the fact that women have a soul equal to men's but it regards them temptresses responsible for the fall of Adam and as "second class human beings". Although Christianity as a religion upholds the values of equality, justice, love and brotherhood/sisterhood and saints like St. Bernard, St. Antony, and St. George—the Great, showed love for them, many other saints have cursed and showered abuses upon women as a "gate of devil", "the road of inequality" and "scorpion ever-ready to sting". Pope Leo XIII states that a woman is by nature fitted for "home work". Thus, Christianity established a sort of over lordship on women.³

In Hindu Philosophy woman has been treated as "the better half of man" and she is identified as Goddess [Shakti], Mother [Matra-devo Bhava], sister, daughter, wife [Dharma Patni] and so on. Swami Vivekananda has preached that a nation or country which doesn't respect woman has never become greater nor will ever be in future. Hinduism enunciates that "reality has the aspect of both male and female". The Hindu philosophy accepts female trinity of Durga—Lakashmi—Saraswati as symbols of power, wealth and knowledge. The Vedas ascribed "Shakti as a great source of world". Radhakrishnan calls women as the "Missionary of civilisation and the index of a country's cultural and its spiritual maturity. He points

out that women have more virtue than they claim; they are great lovers, educators par excellence, pillars of strength and source of inspiration to men. She is "sahadharmini" or "ardaghini".

The *Sikh religion* and Guru Nanak awarded an honourable position to women. There is a complete equality with man in religious and secular matters—no Purdah, Sati or Child-marriage. Both men and women take equal part in day-to-day tasks. But, unfortunately today the Sikh women have their space confined to the kitchen ascribed to them by the male members of their family, their patriarchal basis.⁴

Lord Buddha raised the status of women and made them realize their importance in the society. Buddhism and Jainism upheld women's status by providing an alternative position of dignity to those who wished to dissociate themselves from the normal role of women in family and society and join the Sangha. Buddhism and its secular notion of marriage checked 'Sati', 'Child Marriage' and other pernicious institutions of the Medieval Hinduism. It recognized *the individuality and independence* of women. For example, Lord Buddha once stated "a woman child may prove even a better offspring than a male". Jainism had the same philosophy as Buddhism had about women.⁵

Empowerment is a process that focuses on the capacity building of the people to initiate, sustain and own the developmental benefits. In this process, people are enabled to have access, to participate and control decisions of various aspects/activities of welfare as well as developmental programmes. The process of empowerment includes economic, political, social and psychological aspects of human life.

Empowerment starts at an individual level and can spread upto the community level. The empowerment

process is viewed as "stimulating a process of social change that enable the people to exert greater influence in socio-economic and political arenas". It is to create a condition where people have a real choice in occupation, education, housing, wealth and especially in any social issues like leadership building, organization of women and developing a political propensity.

The dictionary meaning of the term 'empowerment' is to give power, to give women capacity, to give legal rights, to enable, to entitle, to endow (invest with powers).⁶ The concept of empowerment is multifaceted. It may be defined to mean process efforts to attain a specific standard of life, to have fullness of life, especially for woeful and the weaker sections of the society. Empowerment underlines individual and collective responsibility to meet the basic needs of the under privileged such as women.

The word 'empowerment' implies power within. It is said that, "The term echoes the general emphasis within the mainstream on unleashing the capacity of individuals to be more entrepreneurial and more self-reliant". Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building to greater participation and decision-making power. It is an active, multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It would consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, to have a greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.⁷

"Empowerment is a process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resources and over

ideology... [Includes, in addition to extrinsic control] a growing intrinsic capability-greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers...."⁸ It is the "process of building capacities and creating an atmosphere, which enables people to fully utilize their creative potential in pursuance of quality of life. Empowerment gives women the capacity to influence decision-making process, planning, implementation and evaluation. It also deepens and popularizes democratic process".⁹

The most conspicuous feature of the term *empowerment* is that it contains the word *power*. To sidestep philosophical debate, it may be broadly defined as the control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which the control can be exercised may be physical, human or financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and labour, money and access to money. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour virtually determining how people perceive and function within given socio-economic and political environments.¹⁰

We can deal with empowerment in two ways: One is empowerment in general to the poor or who are powerless; and second; the empowerment of women. "For the first time Paulo Frier mentioned the term empowerment in his theories by using 'conscientisation'—a process by which the poor could challenge the structure of power and take control of their lives. But he ignored gender as one of the determinants of power. Feminists by including gender

aspect to empowerment expand the Frierian's empowerment analysis".¹¹

It was only Divya Pande who talks about empowerment at a collective level by emphasizing joint efforts in utilizing resources and opportunities. Most of the scholars talk about the individual empowerment of gaining confidence, control over material and non-material resources and setting agenda of one's own life.

Empowerment is needed by everyone at all levels. It enables an individual to know about herself/himself, what she/he wants, have confidence, awareness, mobility, choices, control over resources and decision-making power. In the words of Hapke Holley, empowerment is "access to and control over productive resources, knowledge and awareness of one's self and society, personal needs, health issues, availability of social and economic resources, how to take advantage of them, self-image i.e. confidence to take action in one's life are the components of empowerment".

Empowerment fundamentally aims at social transformation. It should be undertaken as a political movement challenging the existing power structure and gender relations that oppress and subordinate women. It is to generate a new structure of power which involves equity, sharing, giving, creating and developing the potentiality of every human being, as the present structure of power is hierarchical, exploitative, destructive and aggressive. It should not lead to taking over men's power and perpetuate the same exploitative and hierarchical structure. It should create a world of equality and make the best use of potentiality of all human beings in constructing the more human world".¹²

Empowerment is impossible without having human

equality and freedom, as human being is the central concern and human dignity is the supreme value. Empowerment is the encouragement of self-assertion and self-confidence so that one can face and resolve the problems of self-harassment that can't be resolved by legal procedural solutions.¹³ Empowerment aims to end the political and economic gap between men and women through redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women based on development strategy, which is no longer, oriented on growth, the work market and military power.¹⁴

There is really a need to empower women. It is because in almost every sphere of human functioning, the roles defined for women are subordinated to those defined for men, the rights for women are fewer or less emancipating than those men have, and the obligations women have are more limiting than those of men. Unequal gender relations imply that men not only have and can exercise greater power than women in almost all spheres of functioning; they also have culturally and often legally sanctioned power over women and have greater control of and access to resources and information. This inequality in gender relation is embodied in various societal institutions, but is reproduced daily in the household.¹⁵

Socialization for inequality, differential treatment of girls and boys from birth, labeling women to as supplementary earners, despite their often substantial contribution to household income, lead women to have a low sense of self-worth.¹⁶ By any yardstick, women are 'vital human infrastructure' and to bring them into the mainstream of development would certainly contribute to the social development in an effective and efficient manner.

Empowerment of women is, thus, very much

essential to achieve sustainable development. It includes both a personal strengthening and enhancement of life chances, and collective participation in efforts to achieve equality of opportunity and equality between different genders, ethnic groups, social classes and age groups. It enhances human potential at individual and social levels of expressions. It is an essential starting point and a continuing process for realizing the ideals of human liberation and freedom for all.

In this hierarchical male dominated society, based on divisive, destructive and oppressive values, Women's Empowerment must lead to a new understanding of power and experiment with ways of democratizing and sharing power-building new mechanisms for collective responsibility, decision-making and accountability. It would necessarily mean defining the notions of family and masculinity; changing man-woman relationship. It will have to lead women and the "new men" to address global concerns and issues including environment, war, violence, militarism and population.

Empowerment of women is the extension of choices in personal life regarding education, employment, marriage etc. It is to give women 'power' and 'control' over resources and self. It enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. To empower women means to make them active participants in national development not only for their own benefit but also the whole society. So, it is recognized in *Human Development Report [HDR] 1995* that "empowering people—particularly women, is a sure way to link growth and human development".¹⁷ And, empowerment does not only mean their material growth but also blossoming of their intellectual,

personal, emotional, psychological, and cultural and even *spiritual* progress.

To Amita Agarwal, empowerment means "to let women live their own life in a way they think appropriate on the basis of their conditions, family circumstances, qualities and capabilities of which they themselves are best judges. Demand for empowering is not a demand for equality or superiority; it is the demand to them realize their own true self which should not be denied to them on any basis whatsoever, anywhere, anytime and anyplace. To realize this ideal, an appropriate environment should be created which is not an easy task. For this efforts will have to be made at every level and in every sphere".

A humanized cultured concept of women empowerment would strive to release her from ideas of social victimization and make her act on her own, "like a responsible adult, not abjectly like a helpless member of an oppressed group fully dependent on government for protection"¹⁸.

The significance of the concept of women empowerment lies in the facts:

- ♦ Women empowerment is a social process that neutralizes women oppression. If women aren't empowered, they will continue to be victims through their traditional subordination.
- ♦ The object of equality and justice to women in a male-dominated society can be achieved through women empowerment.
- ♦ Through empowerment women will be more respected and the world will become a better place to live in.
- ♦ Women empowerment constitutes the base for human liberation and empowerment for all.

Although women neutralize patriarchal structure in order to gain their own rights, in social realities women can't be empowered effectively at the expense of other.

- ♦ Women empowerment is all but an indispensable broader social justice and would, thus, result in ideal democratic processes.

Women get liberated because they start recognizing the importance of reversal of the values and attitudes which had given rise to oppression and subjugation. As they grew up believing what existed was just and natural, the new look makes them think differently. The power of questioning what was denied to them all these years stealthily gets an entry into their lives and they start believing that the rights of equality, dignity and justice are as a need to them as to their male counterparts. It is essential that the subjugation and oppression of women perpetuated by family, class, caste and religion must be curbed. Women in both the worlds-developed and the developing—are discovering that they can translate their efforts to protect themselves into effective political, social and economic actions. Empowerment could be a planning goal in the sense that the governmental support is extended to the voluntary sectors as well, both in field of implementation and policy formulation. Empowering women could, thus, be through economic intervention as well as through integrated intervention.¹⁹

There is a widespread confusion and some degree of anxiety about whether women's empowerment leads to the disempowerment of men. It is obvious that poor men are almost as powerless as poor women in terms of access to and control over resources. This is exactly

why most poor men tend to support women's empowerment process that enables women to bring much-needed resources into their families and communities, or that challenge power structures that have oppressed and exploited the poor of both genders.

Resistance, however, occurs when women compete with men for power in the public sphere, or when they question the power, rights, and privileges of men within the family—in other words, when women challenge patriarchal family relations.²⁰

Empowerment of Women and their equal status are more easily said than put into practice. This is more especially so in a society ridden with orthodox and conservative ideals and ideology for which religious sanction and support are not lacking. In such societies, any improvement in the status of women is almost impossible without the co-operation and change of hearts from the part of men. The greatest challenge to women empowerment in our society is that they are women. There is male-dominance in every aspect of society as women keep away from such activities which are regarded as for men. The major challenges in the way of women empowerment are:

- Social barriers being women.
- Lack of self-confidence among women.
- Inadequate financial resources.
- Low female literacy rate.
- Lack of proper training and technical assistance.
- Lack of different types of privileges available to them.²¹

Contrary to the rumors which are spread about feminists are not against men. They are against patriarchy as a system, against aggressive masculinity and against machomen. They want men who are

gentle, who are caring. Thus, the first state of women's empowerment is women's awakening to the facts of their existence. Empowerment is the initial phase of women's liberation, freedom and equity as well as a long-range goal of women's political participation. It is a first step in a long journey towards the formulation and realization of human rights and responsibilities that transcend gender role stereotypes and the objectification of women and the men.

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Women at Present:

A General Overview

Men and women are complementary opposites. Each is said to fulfill itself by developing just those qualities lacking in the other. Woman represents love, fidelity, self-sacrifice, devotion, tenderness and innocence. Man is thought to represent power, courage, will, strength and labour. Apart from biological differences, men and women possess equal qualities. But these differences have been culturally so misused that it has resulted in large scale exploitation for centuries together.

The overall condition of women in general and those in developing countries especially in India has been far from satisfactory.¹ In almost every sphere of human functioning, the roles defined for women are subordinate to those defined for men. Men have more powers in all spheres of functioning than women. Men have culturally and legally sanctioned power over women and have greater control and access over resources and information. This inequality in gender relations is embodied in various societal institutions but is reproduced daily in the household.²

Theoretically, women enjoy an equal status with men but in practical terms women are considered a weaker sex. A woman is given a secondary status in the family and a lower citizen of the society.³ Women

are more concerned with domestic affairs like household work, child-bearing and rearing, assisting males in fields with no independent identity or freedom of expression. They are restricted to limited number of jobs, entrusted with limited responsibility and have a negligible representation at top level positions such as planners, administrators, managers, ignoring her advice and role in the family, society and community at large.⁴ They are considered as docile workers who have to be protected by father, husband and son. They are denied all freedom and their contribution as active workers and producers is undervalued.⁵ They are considered physically weaker and mentally incapable and are not given the right to independent thinking. They do not enjoy participation in decision-making ranging from minor issues like what to cook for family to career making of children and not to speak of whether to cast vote or whom to vote.⁶

Discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known. Disadvantages against women are common practices in the opportunities of socio-economic development, participation in different activities, availing educational facilities and various other developmental programmes associated with improving the life style and the quality of life, because of social and cultural backwardness. The condition of women in rural areas is far behind and more dissatisfactory than in the urban areas on account of greater backwardness and the prevalence of traditional social and cultural systems of society.⁷ Violence against women is not a myth but a reality. It exists every where. The problem of violence against women is as old as the world in cosmologies, mythologies or legends. The type, frequency, intensity and control of violence

against women may vary from time to time or place to place but is present everywhere. Many cases remain unreported due to cultural means, apathy or ignorance. These incidents may occur in the family, offices, agricultural fields, industries or even public places. The condition of women is very shocking. The cases of rape and gang rape, sexual exploitation, mental torture and humiliations as in police stations, prisons, aftercare homes and other private and public institutions. Vulgar exploitation of women figures in advertisements of all sorts including modeling and commercial films; sexual and mental harassment in streets and workplaces; domestic violence and unwilling motherhood; and the recent happenings of our times-the tremendous rise in killing and burning of young brides for non-fulfillment or insufficient offering dowry. Women become victim of these for no fault of theirs.⁸ Thus, women all over the world are kept out of the socio-political realm as a marginalized section of the society. They are isolated from the mainstream and subjected to all types of discriminations. They are exploited economically, politically, socially and are excluded from the governance of the nation.⁹

*Socialization for inequality, differential treatment of girls and boys from birth, labeling women as "supplementary earners" despite their often substantial contribution to household income lead women to have a low self-image and a low sense of self-worth.¹⁰ Sen (1987) has argued that the "perceived contribution of women as perceived by both men and women, is often lower than their "actual contribution", on account of social norms; the form and nature of work and the perception of legitimacy. e.g.; household maintenance and children tasks are considered a

labour of love rather than gainful work. However, being unpaid, their work goes largely unnoticed! Sen suggests that the visibility of women's participation in "gainful" economic activities is an attestation of their resistance to an acceptance of deprivation. In organizing poor women then, it is not sufficient to only highlight their oppression but also stress their positive contribution to the work processes.¹¹

Women have remained subservient to men in almost all walks of life throughout the human history. Even their subjugation has been very often legitimized ideologically. In Athens and other city states of Greece, women didn't have even the right to citizenship. For a long time after the triumph of representative system in Britain, that was marked by what is known as the "Glorious Revolution" of England in 1688, women's participation in the process remained inconceivable. Even the father of classical liberalism, John Locke (1632-1704), while talking of natural rights of life, liberty and property didn't mean to extend these to women. In fact, the liberal democratic setup that was supposed to be based on the values of freedom, human equality, rule of law and representative government as the principle of popular sovereignty, women were not given their due place in any aspect of life. Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) defined democracy as a government of the people, by the people and for the people but ironically the franchise in the US was restricted to a smaller segment of population and did not include women.¹² The fact is that till World War I not many people thought in terms of extending political role in politics to the fair sex.¹³

In case of married working women, the burden increases two fold. Social values still deem it disrespectful for the male to assume an equal share

in the household responsibility. The expectation that the working women should also fulfill the role of an ideal housewife results in longer working hours for women and family tensions, thus, placing greater physical and mental burdens on the women. Besides, working outside the house does not necessarily bring about financial independence for women. The male heads continue to exercise control over the women's income. Tension arising out of all this may result in physical violence on women, which could mean beating, murder or driving the woman to suicide.¹⁴ According to the United Nations 1991 statistics, women perform 67% of the world's working hours, earn 10% of the world's total income, constitute two-thirds of the world's illiterates and own less than one percent (1%) of the world's property. Even though women make up half of the population and contribute more than their share to the society both at home and outside, they are frequently excluded from position of power. Women are, therefore, the world's largest excluded group and the first oppressed group in the history of mankind. Their oppression is the widest form of oppression in the world, and they enjoy fewer privileges than men. In various societies the roles assigned to males and women vary enormously across time and space. One thing is common and that is the work of women has been regarded as less valued in general. If women are traders, trading will be viewed as menial and simple and if men are traders, it will be viewed as difficult and important. This lower valuation of perceived female characteristics and activities result in women being viewed as subordinate to men.

Overall women have fewer job opportunities than men and are disproportionately found in lower paid and less prestigious occupations. Women who work

outside the home are still responsible for the domestic work of the household and thus bear a double work burden which is an obstacle both to better employment opportunities and to social and political participation.¹⁵

It is estimated that one-third of married women in developing countries are battered by their husbands. This happens even in developed countries. In Germany up to four million women suffer from domestic violence every year.¹⁶ Domestic violence is a serious human rights threat which women are facing in every society—rich, poor, developed and underdeveloped, irrespective of caste, creed, class and educational level. Around the world, one in every three women has experienced violence in one form or the other at home. Most women suffer these violences silently rather than report the matter to the police or even to their parents for fear of family or further victimization.¹⁷ The vulnerability and powerlessness of women accruing from their sex and their inability to fully protect themselves make women subjected to violence, aggression, oppression and exploitation.¹⁸

Man has subjected women to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind...¹⁹

However, some exceptions to women's dependence on men did exist. In ancient Babylonia and Egypt, women had property rights and in medieval Europe they could join craft guilds. Some women had religious authority, e.g.; as Siberian Shamans and Roman priestesses. Occasionally, women had political authority as Egyptian and Byzantine queens, heads of medieval nunneries, Iroquois women, who appointed

men to class and tribal councils. A few highly cultivated women flourished in ancient Rome, China and during Renaissance in Europe.²⁰

In no country do women have political status, access or influence equal to men's. The sweep of women's political subordination encompasses the great variety of cultures, economic arrangements and regimes in which they live. Women frequently exercise political power in a particular arena, and in many situations their political activism is distinctive or unopposed. Rather our point is that these situations are always exceptional in some manner. Neither do we mean that all women experience their subordinate political status in the same way or that all groups of women are equally subordinate to all groups of men.²¹ Although women all over the world take part in politics but at a low degree, particularly in the process of law and decision making, strangely enough, ten parliaments in the world don't have even a single woman representative. There are 33,981 men parliamentarian in the world and the total number of women parliamentarians is 4,512 that is they constitute only 13.28% of total parliamentarians. Moreover, only 7.7% of the parliamentary group leaders and 9% of the party spokespersons are women. The International Labour Organisation while taking into account the negligible representation of women at the higher level bodies of power structures has predicted that at the present rate it would take "five centuries for women to enjoy equality with men."

It has been studied that the final decade of the 20th century witnessed a drastic change in the sphere of women's participation in politics throughout the world. The number of women ministers at the cabinet rank worldwide was 3.4% in 1987 which doubled to

6.8% in 1996. In 1987 there were 93 countries without any women ministers but in 1996 this number was reduced to only 48 countries. About 15 countries reported that women held more than 20% of all the ministerial level positions. Though there are certain silver lines of progress, it is far from satisfactory. The world average of women in national legislatures is only 13% as on December 25, 1998 whereas regional average varies from 3.5% in Arab countries to 37.6% in the Nordic countries.

As per the electoral data reported in 1998, among the 46 developed countries, 14 had below 10% women legislators in the lower chamber, particularly in France, Greece, Japan, etc. The underdeveloped countries like South Africa, Cuba, Vietnam etc have 25-30% women in their lower legislative chambers. Among 11 countries in the Asia Pacific region, only 3 have more than 10% women in their national legislature. In Pakistan the practice of *Purdah* severely restricts the female participation in politics. Among 11 countries in the Asia Pacific region only three have more than 10% women in their national legislature. In fact, the proportion of women legislators has remained quite constant ranging from 0.5% to 5.5%. Women's position in public sector and at bureaucratic level also presents the same. United Nations Decade for Women, which assigned United Nations and its different feeder organizations to construct strategies for increasing full and effective participation of women in political and economic life, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993 and the Beijing Conference in 1995 held the view that women all over the world continue to be marginalized in the game of political and administrative power.²²

Thus, women viewed as commodities are two things

at once: utilitarian, objects and bearers of value. Women as commodities are thus objects to a schism that divides them into the categories of usefulness and exchange value to be exploited in conditions of conflict and considered the spoils of war. Her (the women's) role is what man inscribes and on it; that is, her body, thus the properties of a woman's body have to be suppressed and subordinated to the exigencies of its transformation into an object of circulation among men.²³

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Women In India

Historical Background

Human species can not be conceptualized without the inclusion of women. One feminist critic once pointed out that women constitute one-half of the sky. When women are talked about with respect to their position in India, an irregular pattern definitely emerges. In ancient India, women enjoyed a privileged status and their condition was much better. Many religious rituals were regarded as incomplete unless women were present.¹ Vedic literature which is the prime source of all cultural manifestations in India depicts a vivid picture of ancient Indian womanhood. During this period (2000-1500 BC), men and women enjoyed the same status and all writers agree that women were free enough and enjoyed an equal status in almost all respects. Her status was really high.² Education and knowledge was open to women in this period. Even among the authors of the Vedas, there were said to be twenty-two women.³ Many scholars like Asthana, Majumdar and others accepted her role in society as the measuring rod in assessing the standards of culture. Reverence was also given to a woman in a mother's image, a symbol of life, strength and purity with immense capacity for patience, sacrifices and suffering.⁴ Shantiparva observes, "A house only cannot qualify to be called home, it is the lady of the house who should be called home. A home

is only the wife; otherwise it is as good as a forest." Thus women in Vedic period enjoy freedom of education and were respected in family as well as society. They played a very important role in familial, social and political life. They participated along men in political bodies like "Sabha" and "Samiti".⁵

The birth of a daughter was not welcomed, but it certainly didn't frighten the parents. Early marriage was not a rule and girls in ruling families used to receive military and administrative training and were entitled to same education as boys and no limitations were put on his or her spouse, both enjoyed equal freedom and equal opportunities.⁶

In Vedic society, husband and wife constituted an indivisible unit in society. Woman was at the helm of affairs and participated in sacrifices performed by her husband and thus became an ultimate helper in the path of virtue. Women were also capable of going through the Brahmacharya stage of life and also entering the last stage.⁷

The roots of discrimination against women in India can be traced back to later Aryan period after 300 BC, an era which was under Brahmanical domination (the priestly class). The growth of the caste system and other such factors led to social decline. Child marriage became the norm in the Brahmanical period. In Brahman tradition wives were expected to worship their husbands, Women were burned in the name of Sati, widows were forced not to remarry and many helpless women were thrown out like garbage. Thus, women were denigrated and degraded in Brahman era. Many of these inhuman practices are still found in many parts of the country. Other religions like Buddhism and Jainism, Sikhism and Islam, have questioned some of these practices in Hinduism, but

by and large, all religions have kept their women in varying stages of confinement and restrictions.⁸

In Brahmanical period, it is found, surprisingly, that women were not allowed to study the Vedas and were not allowed to participate in or perform sacrificial rites. Thus, women were condemned to a life of permanent degradation and misery.⁹ In this period, Indian women were degraded and deprived of their rights, freedom and privileges which they had enjoyed earlier (in Vedic period) and ultimately this maltreatment resulted in the emergence of many names like "secondary sex", "weak sex" and thus subordination to man. Women were subjected to a variety of exploitations, violence and aggressions at the hands of their parents, siblings, relatives and society at large.

Woman was recognized as a member of family or a group, as daughters, wives and mothers and not as individual with an identity or right of *her own*.¹⁰ Sex discrimination emerged as a serious social evil. A son was most desirable due to the convention that the male-child protects his parents from the hell known as "Pum"; the daughter on the opposite pole was considered as a source of trouble. During the Epic period it became a principle that man was the master of woman. All these changes were accompanied by a general and gradual decline in female education and whatever little education the girls were given was at home by parents and relatives. In the "Dharma Shashtra", the position of women became worse and they were exempted from their property. Women were also considered as untrustworthy and incapable of giving any advice. Due to ignorance and incapability, their sphere of influence was limited to the four walls of the house. They were also deprived of the political right of succession to the kingdom. The story of Indian

women after seventh century A.D. was more pitiable—female infanticide, child marriage and custom of *Sati* became widespread.¹¹

Beginning of Change

At the time of advent of the British rule, the position of women in India was at its lowest ebb. Child marriage, *Sati*, *Purdah* and all types of maltreatment were the share of an Indian woman. Feminine literacy was considered as a source of moral danger. Dancing was a lucrative profession for girls. Almost all the Hindu temples openly or surreptitiously harboured devadasis.¹² It can be fairly said that the eighteenth century was the darkest period so far as the women of India were concerned.¹³ However, the result of this plight of women was the powerful movement to improve the position of women by the social reformists.¹⁴

In the mid nineteenth century many socio-religious movements were started in India. The advent of Western liberalism and English education contributed much to the eradication of these age-old social evils and literacy came to be recognized as a desirable accomplishment. Prostitution was recognized as a social evil and the British abolished the custom of *Sati* by law, on humanitarian grounds. It was 4th December 1829, when the British passed the famous resolution by which the custom of *Sati* was made a crime of culpable homicide punishable with fine, imprisonment or both. The orthodox put a stiff opposition but Raja Ram Mohan Roy appeared on the scene to provide an able leadership. The emergence of various religious and social organizations like Brahmo Samaj, Prarthna Samaj and RamaKrishna Mission fought for the cause of women. The banning of *Sati*, child marriage (Civil

Marriage Act of 1872), the spread of education and the promotion of widow remarriage improved the position of women.¹⁵

With the beginning of the twentieth century a number of organizations exclusively for women appeared among high caste and elite women.¹⁶ Of deeper significance for women was the Industrial Revolution. The transformation of handicrafts, which women had always made at home without any wages went to machines for mass production that ultimately resulted in the earning of wages (although little) by the lower class women. This work in factories became the beginning point of the independence of women, although the conditions in these factories were hazardous and their wages were lower than men and their work was legally controlled by their husbands. At the same time, middle and upper class women were expected to stay at their homes as idle, decorative symbols of their husband's economic success. The only other option for respectable women of any class was to work as governesses, clerks, shop assistants and servants and such conditions encouraged the feminist movement.¹⁷ In fact, the movement for the empowerment of women had started with the age of Enlightenment within its egalitarian political emphasis, and the industrial revolution which caused economic and social changes, provided a favorable climate for the rise of feminism, along with other reform movements in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

During the French Revolution, Women's Republican Clubs in France pleaded that the goals of liberty, equality and fraternity should apply to all regardless of gender and other such biases. Mary Wollstonecraft in England published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), the first major feminist work.¹⁸

"Let women share the rights and they will emulate the virtues of men."¹⁹

The birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 provided a political platform to Indian women. In 1900, the first women delegates attended the Calcutta Session of the Congress and spoke from a political forum. This event was the dawn of a new era, which saw Indian women taking an increasingly active part in political activities.²⁰ The Freedom Movement brought women from the homes to face the Lathies, bullets and gave them not only the consciousness of their own strength but also a new vision of their true place in society. Such political awakening of Indian women was equally reinforced in the early 1920's when it gained momentum under the leadership of veteran British champions of women's political rights. Moreover, as a part of women's political movement it had the support and encouragement of all leading men of India.²¹

In 1913, Saroj Nalini Dutt founded Mahila Samities (women's committees) in many towns. She also started women's institutes in Bengal. Several others of these new women's organizations were all Indian in scope. In 1917 the Women's Association (WA) was founded in Madras by Annie Beasant. The National Council of Women in India was founded in 1925 by Lady Aberdeen, Lady Tata and others. Similarly All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was founded in 1927 through the efforts of Margaret Cousins.²² In 1919 V.J. Patel introduced the Hindu Marriage Validity Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council. Education, travel, contact in cities with people of other castes and various other factors widened the outlook of the younger generations, when ideas of marriage, home and life were generally broadened. Many Hindu intellectuals

strongly felt that time had come to bring out radical changes in Hindu laws to suit the needs of society. From 1937 onwards, a number of private bills or resolutions were brought up in the central legislature for improvement of the status of women in society.²³

The right of women to vote throughout the latter part of the 19th century was an important phase of feminism. It was first seriously proposed in 1848 at Seneca Falls on July 19, in a general declaration of the rights of women prepared by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Moit and several others. In India, however, women's right to equal political participation including their right to vote was accepted very gracefully much earlier than most of the western countries. Under the auspices of Women's Indian Association of Madras, a delegation led by Sarojini Naidu with the support of Mahatma Gandhi met Lord Morley when he visited India in 1917. It demanded equal voting rights for men and women and this was the first attempt made by women for their political rights.²⁴ As a result of this in 1919 around ten lakh women obtained voting rights under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. Madras was the first province to grant at least a limited franchise to women in 1921, followed by other provinces. Till 1926, no women ever got elected into any legislative council. Muthu Lakshmi Reddy of Madras was the first woman to be nominated to the Madras Legislative Council and she was also elected as the Deputy Chairperson of the Council. Radhabai Subbaraya, Renuka Roy, Anu Swaminathan were the earliest women who got elected to the central legislature.²⁵

In 1931, the right to contest election was granted to women. It was theoretically significant even only a tiny minority of the female population exercised it. With independence only this right assumed a political

significance. The general elections of 1952 were the first opportunity for the exercise of universal franchise. About fifty-one (51) women contested for the seats in the Lok Sabha, the National Parliament, and out of them nineteen (19) were elected. In the election to State Assemblies, out of 15,573 contestants for 3,370 seats, 216 were women, out of these 82 won.²⁶

In India there was no dearth of male power and still some women came to forefront to participate in war efforts. After all, government agreed to admit women doctors to the army medical service on the same terms as men. British as well as Indian women doctors were declared to be eligible for the selection but they were liable to serve both in and outside India. The Indian military nursing service was constituted by March, 1943 and about 288 girls had joined it. In March, 1942, the Women Auxiliary Corps (WAC) was started in India and was recruited on voluntary basis. They were paid but their services were confined to duration of war within the confines of India.²⁷ Independence brought women constitutional rights of freedom, justice, liberty, equality and dignity for the individual in the form of permeable of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy of the constitution. It was only in 1960 that the women's lot and the nature of gender discrimination were studied scientifically in North America as well as in Europe. Following this, in 1965, a new discipline, "Women's Studies" was first introduced in U.S.A to study women's socio-political and cultural aspects. However, women issues got attention only in 1970 and became an area of debate and discussion in India, following the United Nations proclamation of the year 1975 as the International Women's year, The International Women's decade

(1975-1985) was another effort that further intensified the Indian political leaders and academicians to look into women's subjection in socio-economic and political spheres in India.²⁸

During the 1980's, the larger national level women's organization had come together in a loose alliance and became known as the "Seven Sisters." The autonomous groups held conferences bi-annually to discuss movement issues and strategies. The Indian Association for Women's Studies provides activists and academicians a forum to meet and confer.

The 1990's saw the consolidation of women's movement. Grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Money was available for research on women issues and for some forms of activism. Today autonomous women's collectives are the exception, the majority of groups are NGOs identified with one or another individual. Many such NGOs have become a part of the "delivery mechanism of the government", as they provide services such as reproductive health care to women, or gender training to government functionaries and Panchayats.

As the number of new women's groups, NGOs and organizations grew throughout the country, they felt the need for representation at the national level. The 1963 United Nations Fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 provided such an opportunity. The UN and donor funding enabled the formation of a coordination unit to hold preparatory meetings in different parts of the country. Post Beijing, these groups formed the National Alliance of Women's Organization (NAWO) that played an active role in Beijing plus five meetings held in New York. Women were also organized through a task force set up with

donor support for the Plus Five Process.²⁹

During twenty-five years of the women's movement, the government has amended several laws that affect women, including laws related to dowry, rape, cruelty, maintenance, prostitution and obscenity. India has ratified international conventions such as the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It has set up family courts in some states and the judiciary has issued a series of progressive judgements in favour of women, including a recent judgement on sexual harassment at the work place and on child custody.³⁰ Over the course of U.N. Decade for Women (1975-1985), some of the committee's more general recommendations were taken up. The Equal Remuneration Act was passed in 1976 which *guarantees women equal pay for equal work*. On the same paradigm, a women's department in the Ministry of Labour and Employment was created and similarly a Coordinating Bureau for women was created in the Ministry of Welfare.³¹ With the slogan of decentralization of political power and revitalization of Panchayat Raj Systems, started under the regime of Rajiv Gandhi in late 1980's, women issues and their political degradation attained the central focus of the debate. As a result, through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 and 1994 which guarantee 33 percent reservation for women, women became politically empowered; at least at the grass root level which is a starting point for the translation dream of empowerment at larger scale and magnitude into reality. Fifteen year experience of Local Governance with women participation has shown some good signs of mainstreaming women in several pockets of the country. In spite of this change, the position of women in politics has remained marginal. In India, 'actual

record of women representation in the representative bodies at various levels has been dismal. The representation of women in the Indian Parliament has never gone beyond 10% at any point of time'.³² Over a period of 60 Independent years, India has passed through fourteen General Elections for Lok Sabha.

Strengthened by the ideological legitimacy given to women's participation in political struggles, a few females have emerged as leaders of local movements. Among them are Aruna Roy who heads the right to information campaign emanating from rural Rajasthan and Medha Patkar who leads the powerful "Narmada Bachao Andolan." In a different mould are women like Ela Bhatt who leads the unique Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union of women in the unorganized sector.

Contemporary Situation

From the above discussion it becomes clear that women have not progressed much. In spite of many developments and development of many governmental and non governmental agencies, the progress of women is very much slow. Not only in politics but also in socio-economic and educational spheres women are not given their due share. Many movements which were raised to give women equal status have not met with the desired results. Although many reforms have been made, the outcome of battle for equality has not yet been won.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) which has made a free, frank and objective analysis of the impact of developmental plans and programmes of Indian women, with special reference to rural women, gives us the following profile of women in India:

There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors—economic, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. As women are oppressed in all walks of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life.³³

Table Showing different facts related to Women.
(Taken from, "Emerging Issues in Empowerment of Women: Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 2002: P.142.)

Women illiterates	75%
Rural Illiterate women	83%
Women working in unorganized sectors and	90%
out of these unskilled labour in agriculture and construction	83%
Women having full time employment in organized sectors	14%
Maternity benefits and child care available in organized sectors	3.5%
Registered unemployed school graduates	51lacs
Pregnant women who are anaemic	65%
Infant mortality rate (in the first year of birth)	10%
Of which in slum areas	12.4%
Children dying because of malnutrition before the age of five years	40%
Sex ratio of female: male	933:1000

Expectation of life at birth	51.6 as against 5.26 for males
Property owned by women	less than 1%
On an average a rural woman works for what time per day	18hrs/day

Women in India, as before, continue to face many forms of violence simply because they are women. Among the most extreme forms of violence are those that arise from patriarchal religious views and economic considerations like *Sati*, female infanticide and foeticide, rape and dowry murders. Although *Sati* custom has been declared illegal since 1829, such incidents have continued to occur.³⁴

The barbaric act of *Sati* committed by a 65 year old woman, Kuttu Bai, from Tamoliparna village, district Panna in Madhya Pradesh on 06th August 2002, is a big blot on the face of humanity, thereby challenging the natural right of women to live. What is more strange, the police was stopped from rescuing the woman by pelting stones on them. Even two grown up sons of the said woman did not make any attempt to prevent their mother from committing *Sati*.

In India, sexual exploitation of women and girl children manifest itself in different forms such as sexual abuse, incest, molestation, material rape, wife battering, dowry deaths, immoral trafficking, virginity, desertion, etc. According to the data available, it is estimated that in every seven minutes a sexual crime is committed against a woman in India, every 26 minutes a woman is molested, every 6 minutes a rape takes place and there is a dowry death every 102 minutes. Rape cases have gone up by 22.90%, dowry death cases by 38%, tortures by 90% and eve-teasing

by 20.9%. Prostitution remains a major trap for a girl child. 8000 children are prostituted in Calcutta alone, 40% of the population of sex workers is children forced into the prostitution. There are about 5000 girl children initiated as the devdasis in Karnataka state every year, though it is banned by law. 75,000 girls and women enter into prostitution every year in our country.

According to the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 76% of women are victims of sexual exploitation of some kind and 40% of women face it by the members of their own joint families in India. The Doctor's Conference organized by VIMHANS concluded that as many as 60% of women in mental hospitals are not ill mentally but are victims of sexual exploitation by husbands, in-laws and society at large in India.³⁵ The adverse sex ratio of women to men in India 933:1000 is a window to the state and status of women. Gender inequality is very much present in every sphere of life. As per the Gender Related Development Index, India ranks 103 in the world. The condition of Indian women is reflected in low literacy rate of 46.4% for women and 69% for men. Gender differentiation in enrollment of 540 per 100,000 live births a sex ratio that is increasingly masculine.³⁶

Poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of health care during pregnancy are the major reasons for both maternal and infant mortality. In rural India, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18 and almost same percentage (60%) of married girls bear children before the age of 19 years. Almost one third of the babies are born with low birth weight. Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world estimated to be between 385-487 per 100,000 live births. Almost 125,000 women die from pregnancy and pregnancy related causes every year. Antenatal

Crime Headwise Incidents of Crime Against Women During 2000-2006 and Percentage Variation in 2006 over 2005

S. No.		YEAR							%age Variation in 2006 over 2005
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
1.	Rape	16496	16075	16373	15847	18233	18359	19348	5.4
2.	Kidnapping and Abduction	15023	14645	14506	13296	15578	15750	17414	10.6
3.	Dowry Death	6995	6851	6822	6209	7026	6787	7618	12.2
4.	Torture	45778	49170	49237	50703	58121	58319	63128	8.2
5.	Molestation	32940	34124	33943	32939	34567	34175	36617	7.1
6.	Sexual Harassment	11024	9746	10155	12325	10001	9984	9966	-0.2
7.	Importation of Girls	64	114	76	46	89	149	67	-55.0
8.	Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	-100.0
9.	Immoral Traffic Act, 1956	9515	8796	6598	5510	5748	5908	4541	-23.1
10.	Indecent Rep. of Women Act, 1986	662	1052	2508	1048	1378	2917	1562	-46.5
11.	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	2876	3222	2816	2684	3592	3204	4504	40.6
	TOTAL	141373	143795	143034	140801	154333	166663	184785	5.9

Courtesy:- Official website of Crime bureau of India

services are poor with only 53.8% receiving tetanus toxoid injection and 46.8% having their blood pressure checked and about 80% women are anaemic. Instead of increasing as many as 58% reduce their food intake during pregnancy. 2/3rd of deliveries still take place in homes, with only 43% supervised by health professionals and only 52% of couples in the reproductive age groups use contraception.

According to 1951 census only 7% women were literate and by 1991 it has risen to 39% and in 2001 the percentage was higher i.e. 54.16% of women are now able to read and write. Even after such a considerable increase 245 million women in India can not read or write, comprising the world's largest number of unlettered women. An average Indian woman gets only 12 months of schooling while an Indian male spends 3.5 years in school. More than 50% of girls drop out by the time they are in middle school.³⁷

It is well known that women and children work in huge numbers in bid-rolling, agarbati-rolling, bangle making, weaving, brassware, leather, crafts and other industries and yet only 3% of these women are recorded as labourers. They are forced to work on pitiable wages and are denied all social security benefits. A study by SEWA of 14 traders found that 85% of women earned only 50% of the official poverty level income.³⁸

Women constitute 90% of the total marginal workers of the country. Rural women engaged in agriculture form 78% of all women in regular work. They are a third of all workers on the land. The traditional gender division of labour ensures that these women get on an average 30% lower wages than men. The total employment of women in organized sector is only 4%.³⁹ 94% of women working in non-organizational sector

of economy face serious exploitation. They have never been paid wages equivalent to men and have been held in bondage as indentured servants. They also suffer sexual harassment at the hands of their male employers. Even the women who work in organized sectors of the economy have encountered hardships. In spite of the existence of Equal Remuneration Act, women have generally been paid less than men except in the service sector. In many factories and firms, labour laws have not been followed consistently, nor have male dominated trade unions made elimination of discriminatory practices against women workers a priority.⁴⁰

The working women face numerous problems, especially in fast industrializing-urbanizing societies. They are facing an entirely new set of problems like maladjustment, status problems, family crisis, divorce and intergenerational conflicts. In the context of these set of problems, Smelser referred to certain problems of women like the "crisis of adjustment" and Srinavas mentioned the problems of "status strain" in which the status women fell further. Other sociologists talked about the problems of working women such as non-correspondence between their economic mobility and social mobility, status strain, and impact of coming out of their seclusion.⁴¹

From the above facts and figures, it can be concluded that the overall condition of women in general and those in developing countries, especially in India, is far from satisfactory. More than mere sexual dimorphism, the gender superiority of male has contributed much to the special difficulties that women face in sexual division of labour, specific nature of tasks they do at home and outside and even unequal distribution of resources like food within the

household which are a common feature in rural and semi-urban areas where every dawn brings with it a long march in search of fuel, fodder and water. It does not matter if women are old, young or pregnant; crucial household needs to be met day after weary day.⁴²

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Women in Kashmir

Kashmiri women have witnessed varying fortunes. At times they have risen to pinnacles of glory, distinguished themselves as rulers in their own right, as regents of minor princes, as powerful queens - consort, as diplomats in peace and war, as commanders of armies, as thrifty land-ladies, as builders and reformers and as percepts of religious lore. In managing home and in dancing and singing, they have earned fame. In fact, there was no field of social activity in which they had not participated with their men folk. But progress did not have a continuous flow, glory didn't prove everlasting, and they had to face many faces of the ill-fate. Times came when they were gradually deprived of the rights previously enjoyed by them. In such times, they were enslaved both intellectually and physically. However, under bondage they did not wholly give in but, despite the soul-shattering ignominy to which they were subjected, they valiantly struggled against injustice during the long dismal period. With the dawn of modernism in Kashmir at the close of the 19th century, women had slowly started re-emerging in social life to contribute their share to the freedom struggle and to the reconstruction of their homeland.

Broadly speaking, from early times down to the thirteenth century A.D. Kashmiri women enjoyed

remarkable freedom, wielded ample power and exercised responsibility which gave them a high status in the society. Members of both the sexes equally shared joys and sorrows of life. In Kashmir, it can be said, that the status of a woman was much better than in the rest of India. Here, they were afforded opportunity to distinguish themselves in any sphere of social activity. As a matter of fact "they had emerged from the domestic into the political stage, were free, owned land and other immovable property, managed their own estates and even fought on the battle-field as generals and commanders at the head of troops¹. At least, some women attained enviable positions in the social or political life which enabled them to exercise enormous influence so that at times even kings and nobles had to bow before their stubborn resolve.

In Kashmir, there was a tradition that at the time of coronation of a king, the queen had to be present and actively participate in the ceremony. She shared the throne in the royal durbar on the auspicious occasion and the royal preceptor (rajguru) showered sacred waters of the abhisheka (coronation) over the queen in the same manner as over the king. She never ceased to take deep interest in the administration of the kingdom. Thus, trained in the art of governance, the queen, at the demise of the king, ruled the country in her own right if, and so long as, she felt necessity of doing so. As a matter of fact, the queens have done well in comparison with the kings who have preceded or succeeded them.

Although, the king was defacto no less than de jure the sole ruler and his word was final, he always consulted/discussed the problems of vital importance with his queen. He could not make appointments to key positions without taking her advice. Even the

question of succession to the kingdom and installation of a new prince on the throne is stated to have been finally settled by strong-minded queens of Kashmir.

In later periods, Hindu society became less liberal and denied higher education to women. "By the time of Smritis around the beginning of the Christian era, Vedic knowledge was closed to women although the heterodox sets still catered for them"².

Surrounded by high mountains and aloof from the rest of the sub-continent, Kashmir appears to have remained mostly unaffected by this illiberal wave. Under Buddhism, the women of the valley became freer and received better intellectual nourishment. Girls of the poorer classes and low castes could never have been to school nor tasted any joys of intellect. But high caste women were well advanced and capable to match their intellectual attainments with the scholarship of learned men. Unfortunately, not a single book or treatise written by a Kashmiri woman has survived from the old times. One can only surmise that such productions, if there were any, have been destroyed either by the vagaries of time or the cruel hands of vandals³.

In the matter of personal adornment and the ways of living, Kashmiri women of the early times were no less remarkable. They loved to be zailly attired and had invented styles in dress and in make up of hair which indicate a high level of culture. On the battlefield, Kashmiri women wore red trousered uniforms like other soldiers in arms. However, it must be recognized that in respects Hindu Society in Kashmir as elsewhere adopted customs and enacted laws which were iniquitous to women and didn't allow them the same freedom as enjoyed by men; they were treated as slaves. No education was given to them⁴. At least in one respect—burning of widows—the custom was

abominable and can't be supported by any canon of civilization or humanity. In practice, the law that the marriage was indissoluble was strictly enforced where women were concerned, a man could re-marry in the life-time of his first wife and, what was worse, he could take as many girls as he wished into wedlock. For small faults or on mere pretext innocent women were divorced, thus, polygamy was allowed in Kashmir and carried the stamp of social approval; usually the ruling princes and the men of the upper classes had plurality of wives. King Harsha outdid all others. Kalhana writes "in his inner-apartments over three hundred and sixty women of pure character were only admitted by him whose mind had become infatuated". There were practically no restrictions on the liberty of men in this behalf. Worse still, the widows of the princes and upper class men were not allowed to remarry. Instead, they were burned alive with the dead body of their husbands on their funeral pyre, the practice known as Sati.

But, despite the heinous custom of Sati and ban on remarriage of widows, a Hindu woman had the right to freely choose her own partner in life. A woman also enjoyed the right of separation and if dissatisfied with the marriage on rational grounds she could, through mutual agreements with her husband, obtain a decree of divorce. Even kings are known to have married divorced women and the progeny of such marriages have subsequently ruled the land as monarchs in their hereditary right. Birth, caste, or sex do not appear to have been insurmountable obstacles to advancement of women in old Kashmir, even untouchability was no bar. Accomplishment in fine arts of singing and dancing, adroit manipulation of statecraft or skillfulness in mediation and negotiation and, above

all, personal beauty have brought women to the fore and raised them to the status of queens, army commanders and diplomats. After having attained any exalted position many of them have generally been able to maintain balance and prove their worth. In conclusion, it can be said that in Ancient and early Middle Ages, the Kashmiri women enjoyed sufficient freedom, though they also suffered certain unbearable disabilities.

In the middle of the 14th century or, more precisely, in the year of Christian era 1339, the last of the Hindu rulers who was significantly a woman, Kotadevi, was deposed by an alien upstart Shah Mir, an influential Muslim courtier, who thereafter ascended the throne. The sensitive queen unable to endure the disgrace ended her wretched life by committing suicide. With Kota's death, not only did Hindu rule come to a close, it also entailed loss of the special status enjoyed by the queens and of the freedom of women in general. However, it may candidly be admitted that with the establishment and consolidation of the Muslim rule in the valley, women were gradually and increasingly deprived of those rights and privileges which they had acquired and enjoyed for many centuries, may be thousands of years. In fact, with the downfall of the Hindu rule and capture of power by Shah Mir, the social fabric underwent a complete change.

Loss of rights and privileges was but a part of the injustice that women had to suffer after the downfall and death of Kota. Under the pernicious influence of religious zealots and bigoted preachers who poured into the valley in large numbers at the Accession of Sikander But Shikan (1389-1413AD) the system of Purdah, unknown to Kashmiris, was introduced and at the behests of Mullahs and Waizes women began to

be screened and secluded. The Muslim women of wealthier section and high pedigree were first to be victimized; they went behind the veil. The women forgot all about their personal adornment; the dignity and safety of a lady lay in being secluded, veiled and unseen by men other than the nearest kin; their sole meaning and purpose in life was to keep the homes, to gratify the desires of their husbands and to procreate children. The process of humiliation reached farthest limits under the Afghans. It is under these barbarian rulers (1752-1819 A.D.) that the valley witnessed the darkest period of national depression. Though men and women were, without distinction, subject to hardship by the Afghan tyrants, women became special targets of their licentious behavior. No wonder that within a score of years of the Afghan Rule, Kashmiri women were physically and spiritually shattered; their presence in every sphere of social activity was totally eclipsed.

The Sikhs, who succeeded the Afghans as the rulers of the Valley for a brief period of 27 years [1819-1846 AD], proved no less tyrannical and cruel. In 1846 AD, the Vale was sold for 75 lakh rupees by Lord Hardinge, the Governor General of East India Company to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra, as a reward for his perfidy against his Sikh Master and the people of Punjab. The new masters evinced little or no interest in the moral and social uplift of their subjects, at any rate for several decades after the occupation of the valley. At the advent of Maharaja Ranbir Singh's rule in 1858 A.D., Kashmiri women had lost everything for which they were illustrious in the past ages. Continued suppression for centuries and tyranny of wicked rulers had deprived them of their physical beauty and intellectual refinement; they were reduced virtually to a sub-human state and lived

merely through sufferance. In the long and unrelieved period of slavery, Kashmiris forgot all about the past and heights that women had scaled in some periods of their history. A time had come when through force of habit, the people began to believe that degraded status which hard days had forced upon the women was natural to them. It was taken as axiomatic that women were fit only to be domestic slaves, objects of carnal enjoyment or, at best, means for procreation of children. Even cleanliness among women unless it be for religious purpose, was, by and large, discouraged and never rewarded or highly spoken of. Sluttish appearance had been fostered first in the days of Afghans. It had a justification then—to protect young and innocent girls from being assaulted or ravished they had to look ugly and untidy. Subsequently, under Sikhs, it acquired sanctity of a national habit. Thus, the habit of uncleanness was forced on women, as is stated by a modern historian by quoting the unsophisticated reply of a patient in distress, "once when a Zanana [woman] Missionary was impelled to ask, 'O! Dear Kashmiri Women, Why won't you wash', they looked at her wondering and replied, 'we have been so oppressed that we can't care to be clean'⁵. This explains the fact that under an oppressive rule during Afghan and Sikh times, cleanliness involved imposition or abduction, and thus, the habit of uncleanness was forced on women. On the social level, cleanliness was equally ill-advised. The Kashmiri women were known for their beauty throughout India and they were often abducted and sometimes even sold⁶. This explains why the Kashmiri women put on dirty dresses. Every Kashmiri woman who had "ornaments beyond the common or clothes better than the roughest" was "marked down for plunder by the rapacious officials".

At the close of the 19th century, therefore, Kashmiri women had sunk to a low level of destitution and ignorance. They had lost charms of body and refinements of mind; they lacked self-confidence, spirit of revolt and even a sense of righteous indignation.

The sale of young girls in Kashmir to established houses of ill-fame in Srinagar and India was both protected and encouraged by the Dogra rulers. According to Robert Thorp, the license granting permission for the purchase of a girl for this purpose, cost about 100/= chilkee rupees in Ranbir Singh's time⁷. In 1880, the Maharaja received 15 to 25 percent of the whole revenue of his state from the gains of his licensed prostitutes. It is also said that there were 18,715 state prostitutes in Kashmir in 1880. No attention was paid toward the prostitute's health which was clear from the fact that only there were 2500 prostitutes admitted in Mission Hospital who were suffering from sexually transmitted diseases. After the death of a prostitute, her property was taken by the government⁸.

At Tashwan (Srinagar) and Maisuma (Srinagar), the two main centers of prostitution, girls used to stay at windows well-decorated to invite the people. Call-girls weren't allowed to stop their trade, marry or change residence. Though the Maharaja derived a lot of income from the prostitutes, no amount of money was spent on their benefit. Another misery to which these prostitutes were subjected they could not marry and settle down as respectable women⁹.

No one even the religious reformists did raise any voice against the houses of ill-fame and immoral traffic of women. However, a gallant barber of Maisuma (Srinagar) named as Muhammad Subhan Naed¹⁰ rose against the many ill-fame houses situated in Maisuma.

And it was 1934 when his selfless services ultimately bore the fruit and state passed an Act suppressing immoral traffic of women¹¹.

Child marriage was prevalent among the Pandits and Muslims. While widow remarriage was practised by the Muslims, it was not allowed in Hindus. The condition of these widows was very miserable. Mr. Biscoe remarks, "as there was no restriction to early marriage there were numbers of child widows who were obliged to live in their father-in-laws house, and do as they were told. I came to know of the cruelties practised on these girls especially by the Brahman priests, who were often the fathers of the drowned babies. The infants were thrown either in the river or to the pariah dogs at night so that the Hindu religion should not be disgraced".¹²

But, the wave of the Western ideas which had slowly but steadily advanced in the wake of British domination to every corner of the Sub-Continent began to have its impact on the politics and culture of god-forsaken Kashmir as well. At the Accession of Pratab Singh, the third ruler of the Dogra Dynasty, a big change occurred. For reasons, good or bad, the Suzisian power reduced the new Maharaja to the position of nominal prince, a figure head of the government. The British residency took over the charge of the entire administration and introduced vast administrative, educational and economic reforms in the annals of land. It ushered in the dawn of modernism in the state; the slumbering Kashmiris re-awakened and women, too, began to open their eyes, recover lost ground and regain their innate virtues. The social evils that had crept in Srinagar society did not escape the notice of Christianity missionaries.

The honour of pioneering a movement for

rehabilitating Kashmiri women, for initiating them into the arts of civilization and for re-kindling in them the desire to live, must go to the foreign Christian missionaries. In the opposition from both the tyrant government of the Dogras and the superstitious elders of the Hindu and Muslim communities, the noble missionaries, with amazing patience, undertook the most arduous task of educating teen-aged girls. One of the influences of Missionaries was that an element of private enterprise in education was stimulated.

After many years of ceaseless toil some pioneer lady missionaries were successful in getting a school established in Srinagar where a few tiny girls came to learn the three R's. It was in 1880 that Rev. J.H. Knowles, the founder of modern schools in Srinagar, laid the foundation of a Christian Missionary School on the Hospital premises in Srinagar¹³. In 1891, Rev. Tyndale Biscoe joined the school to assist Knowles. At that time there were 250 pupils on the school's roll¹⁴.

Between 1893 and 1895 a girl's school was opened in Fateh Kadal [Srinagar] by the Mission Ladies. Among the heroic souls who made girl's education acceptable in Srinagar in the midst of severe odds were Miss Churchill Taylor, Miss Stubbs and Miss Goodall.

In 1912, Miss Fitze started a girl's school. In 1914, a number of girls' schools rose to three in the city. By 1916, the girls were seen "coming better than ever before and mothers actually eager about their learning". In 1918, the school Fateh Kadal was raised to Middle standard and it received a grant of rupees 700/- from the state. The CMS Girls School underwent a radical change during the period when Miss Mallinson was its principal (1922-61). It can be said that it was Miss Mallinson¹⁵ who was instrumental in bringing about enough educational and cultural

advancement among the women of Srinagar.

Without making a reference, however, to the great role of Molvi Rasul Shah popularly known as Sir Syed of Kashmir, any account of the educational, social and political metamorphosis of Kashmir is incomplete. He initiated a vibrant Muslim education movement in the Nineties of the 19th century. Molvi Rasul¹⁶ Shah came from Mirwaiz family of Srinagar. He was the first who like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, was bestirred into action by the backwardness of his community. Imbued with some progressive ideas, he realized that without modern education, the Muslims will remain always backward. He believed that good education on Western lines, supported by wise religious teaching from the Quran, would produce young Muslims of capacity and character. In this he was greatly helped by some outsiders who helped the Molvi was Munshi Ghulam Rasul Shah, the then-revenue Minister of Kashmir. It was through the efforts of the latter that the school received grant-in-aid of Rupees 50/= (Fifty) per month from the state. The school was then raised to the middle standard. English was also taught. In order to mobilize public opinion in his favour, the Molvi founded an association called "Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam". It was devoted to religious and educational subjects of the Muslims. The Muslim officials encouraged Mirwaiz Rasul Shah but local Muslims, under the leadership of fanatic Mullahs, raised a violent agitation and even attempts were made on the life of the Molvi. Despite this opposition, the school progressed and soon became a high school, the fore runner of the present Islamia College, Srinagar. It was unfortunate that the successors of Mirwaiz dabbled in petty politics and did nothing for the social and moral uplift of the

Muslim community. This narrow outlook on religion and politics did much to promote faction and rivalry.

Having thus removed the impediments, the path was cleared for Kashmiri patriots to travel with less difficulty and render help to the women in their onward march towards the goal of liberation.

It was, however, only in 1926 that an earnest movement was launched on a national scale for the uplift of women. In the same year, a non-official organization was founded with the laudable object of improving the mental and material conditions of the Kashmiri women. It was called "Women's Welfare Trust". The Trust was formed with the object of "advancing the welfare of the Kashmiri women by imparting to them the knowledge, by stimulating home industry among them and by promoting their physical health and well-being". The founding members of the Trust were: (i) Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, (ii) Mrs. L.D. Van Gheet Gildemeester, (iii) Sri Kantha Toshakhani, (iv) Shridhar Koul Dulloo and (v) Aftab Koul Nizamat. The Trust formulated several plans for the advancement of Kashmiri women, the most important of them all being education of both girls and adults. Apart from the academic activities of the schools, the Trust sponsored a Women's League with the object of holding debates and discussions on such topics as social evils, unhealthy customs, causes of prevalent diseases, role of patriotic women in the reform movement and the methods to achieve all-round progress. Ranim Ded Razdan was the President and Devki Koul [wife of Aftab Koul Nizamat] was the Secretary of the League. Fortunately, the League was also successful in planting new ideas in the minds of women.

Though the beginning was humble, the trust

achieved a phenomenal success within a few years. Simultaneously, through the efforts of some Non-Dogra ministers coupled with assistance of enlightened patriots the more formidable difficulties were gradually overcome and an increasing number of girls sought admission in the government schools. With the liberation of India from foreign rule in 1947, new hopes were raised in the minds of women. The Kashmiri women too have benefitted by the new code which was adopted by the State Legislature.

Meanwhile, the policy of Kashmir Government towards women's education had not remained unaffected. Maharaja Hari Singh, liberal in his views, created a separate department in the administration for their education. Women's uplift was one of his objectives. The girl's education was kept under the control of a Chief Inspectress, a highly educated and trained English Lady, Miss E. Chawner, was appointed to the post. A number of girl schools (primary as well as high schools) opened not only in city but also in the Muffassil at all important towns and big villages, in which girls of all classes and communities were admitted without any distinction. The educated ladies with proper qualifications were imported from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and far-off Bengal to recruit the staff. The Maharaja Government granted liberal grants-in-aid to private institutions where education was imparted to girls, the grant allowed for a girl in the private schools was double than the grant for a boy in such schools. Early in 1929, an organization called the Women's Welfare Association was sponsored for the achievement of a four-fold objective:-

1. The first and foremost aim of the movement was to dispel illiteracy and to spread education among the women;

2. the second object was to build a park and a gymnasium for recreation of women and their children;
3. to liquidate poverty or at least, alleviate the condition of the destitute widows and forlorn women by teaching them handicrafts and other arts, was a third aim, and;
4. the last but not least object of the movement was to look after the health of the women a large majority of whom was emaciated, haggard, sickly and pale.

In India, a strong movement for emancipation of women had been launched long ago through the tireless efforts of men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. The evil practice of *Sati* was banned and widow remarriage legalized. In 1929, with the adoption of Child Marriage Restraint Act popularly known as the Sharda Act¹⁷, the Maharaja took measures to enact a similar legislation in Kashmir which changed the outlook of the people and immensely helped the local reformers in their work for the emancipation of women.

The activities of the Women's Welfare Association in the valley were confined to Srinagar. It was proposed to extend them to regions outside the limits of city. But only after two years after its birth there were, in 1931, political disturbances on an extensive scale which resulted in far-reaching changes, in the altered circumstances, the Women's Welfare Association could hardly function, it dissolved in the fire of uprisings and nobody shed any tears over its disappearance.

Arya Samaj did play its role in reforming the society. The Samaj was represented in Srinagar by those Hindus who had come from Punjab as state employees and

by those who settled permanently or semi-permanently in the city for business purposes. To begin with, the Samaj did not register any success but with the passage of time some Kashmiri Pandits extended their support to the Samaj in their social works. The evil effects of child marriage were publicized. Propaganda was also conducted in favour of widow remarriage¹⁸. It is also remarkable that during 1920 to 1930 the Arya Samajists celebrated the marriages of half a dozen widows in Srinagar¹⁹. Arya Samaj was also engaged in educational propaganda. A more important influence of Arya Samaj was a group of young educated Kashmiri Pandits who organized themselves into body known as Fraternity in 1930²⁰.

The Pandit community formed "Fraternity" with the conception of social reform and included not only check on wasteful expenditure and the like but also spread of education among women and freedom for widow's remarry, revival of cultural activities, improvement in community's health, encouragement to inter-dinning, rural construction and change in national dress to make it decent, graceful, dignified and suitable for local climatic conditions. In the same year (1930), the Fraternity launched a campaign to mobilize public opinion for the furtherance of the proposed social reforms. Public Meetings were held in different parts of the city to explain the need and the aims of the Movement. It was for the first time after several centuries, women of Pandit community participated in public assemblies which were avowedly convened for non-religious and mundane purpose. In the beginning, curtains were drawn to separate men from women but as enthusiasm grew and the Movement gathered momentum, this restriction was deemed unnecessary and, indeed, at one place, the

women, to the surprise of the conductors, removed the screen and set side by side with men to listen to the speakers.

Public opinion in Kashmir in early twenties was, however, vehemently hostile to widow remarriage and few dared to suggest the reform to the Pandits. What was worse, the Law of the land sided with the oppressor. However, twenty years later, in 1924, a few kind-hearted and liberal Pandits braved the public fury and openly supported the cause. Pundit Chandra Joo, an advocate of the High Court, was the leader of the group. Another pioneer of the movement was Swami Hari Har Koul, a man of broad religious view, himself a bachelor, he spoke and wrote fearlessly in support of the reform and persuaded widows to defy the community by marrying their paramours if they had any. However, a day came in 1928, when the perseverance and sincerity of the two humanists bore fruit and a widow agreed to marry a man on her own choice and one courageous Purohit, Gobind Bhatt Shastri, of Rainawari performed the religious rites. It was a red-letter day, an occasion for merriment and rejoicing for the reformers but a day of mourning for no-changers. Biscoe writes that this marriage caused a great uproar in the city. But like all storms, this one blew itself out in time.²¹ After it, Kashmir witnessed an unprecedented upsurge which taught several lessons to the Pandit community, one among them being the urgency to allow widows to remarry if the Hindu minority was to survive in a struggling world. As a result, Maharaja Hari Singh pleasantly made a royal pronouncement legalizing widow remarriage, known as Widow Remarriages Act of 1933.

The movement for the social reform was confined to the Pandits for various reasons. They had made

rapid advance in education, achieved a bit of political power, by capturing subordinate jobs in the administration, and they were beginning to extricate themselves from the effects of long and deep slumber. The Muslims, on the other hand, were still backward and almost uninfluenced by the impact of modernism, at any rate so far as their women folk were concerned. They had made very little progress in higher education and could not, therefore, grasp the importance of emancipation of women for the healthy growth of society. Although the spread of Islam in the Valley proved a blessing for the Kashmiri women in as much as they were freed from certain shackles which bound them down. It can be said without any doubt that the status of women after they embraced Islam, particularly in the early days of Muslim rule was better in these respects and by no means pitiable. But, when wicked men came to power and, later on, when the land was over run by foreign armies of the Mughals, the Pathans and the Sikhs, women suffered along with all other people. Men took advantage of the chaotic political conditions to enslave women. The Islamic Philosophy which had been a powerful vehicle of freedom was turned into a strong weapon of enslavement and gradually the Muslim women sank to a position of servitude in society despite the broad claims of Muslim Divines that the faith conferred invaluable blessing on its female votaries.

In the late twenties of the 20th century the Ahmedis appeared in Srinagar. It was Molvi Abdullah who courageously opposed *purdah*, supported girl's education and launched a crusade against the Mullahs²². He also denounced the evil customs which hampered the progress of Muslim women. But, his success was short-lived since the movement of 1931

turned the attention of the entire Kashmiri Muslim community to the more vital issues of the time. Thus, the movement for reform Muslim women receded into the background on account of changed political conditions. It should, however, be remembered that the social, economic and political changes which occurred after 1931 contributed greatly to the emancipation of Muslim women.

Prior to 1931, the reins of the Muslim society in Kashmir were in the hands of Mullahs two of whom, Mirwaiz Jamia Masjid and Mirwaiz Hamadani, wielded huge social and religious influence. Both of them agreed that the mind of Muslims, particularly the women, were to be saved from pollution caused by the impact of modern education and western ideas. Study of Science was forbidden in schools run by them. To keep women in bondage and ignorance was one of the main tenets of their creed. They upheld *purdah* and polygamy, opposed girl's education and discouraged any change for the better in the demeaning social status of women. Liberation of women was a revolting ideal to the Mullahs and the Mirwaizes. However, the changes and developments which were taking place in the sister community, changes began to take place in dress and in old habits of Muslims. Muslim women of well-to-do classes had begun to discard *purdah*; more and more girls were attending schools; cleanliness was rewarded and greater attention paid to personal comeliness, a new was visible in the decaying bones of the women folk. Such was the perspective of the struggle for freedom of women on the eve of political upheaval in July 1931.

In the contemporary history of Kashmir, 1931 stands out as a year of profound significance. It was the year;

the people of Kashmir rose from their age-old slumber, and took up cudgels not only against the alien rule, but also against the all exploiting agencies such as the Jagirdars, landlords, capitalists, Mullhas and corrupt officials²³. No wonder that women too came forward to bend their energies in the cause of freedom and demanded what was due to them in the New Kashmir that was rising for the ashes of the old. But, their backwardness in education and other disabilities prevented them from achieving the fame to which their earnestness and sacrifice entitled them. Women of Muslim gentry and upper middle class who were generally secluded did not take any part whatsoever in the struggle; the number of educated ones was very small. Nevertheless, poor women of the working sections—those who had ever refused to be screened or confined within four walls through out the six centuries of the foreign domination—were infused with the new spirit and rose equal to the occasion and continued to be in the vanguard of the fighting forces all through. Therefore, a unique feature of Kashmir's freedom struggle was that during its first phase, the women participants came from 'have nots' section who could in no way be called as emancipated, enlightened and educated. The instinct was inborn, result of centuries of suffering, denial and torture. It may also be interpreted as a traditional characteristic of the Kashmiri women's yearning for independence. During this period, the women processionists, many of them with sucking babies in their arms, passed through the streets raising slogans either against the oppressive Dogra regime or demanding the closure of their imprisoned leaders and for the establishment of a democratic set up²⁴.

Addressing a procession at Mazar-i-Shuhda, on July

27, a woman speaker said:

Our men should sit in their homes and wear *Burqas* ... we are proud of our Panjabi Muslim brethren but so far they have merely confined themselves to merely issuing statements.....we request the members of British Parliament to take our grievances to the League of Nations...we appeal to the army not to oppress women as it was no chivalry. But if they have any such instruction, they will find us ready to meet the challenge.²⁵

The public meetings held by the Muslim political workers were every where attended by women especially when the speaker happened to be Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah or any other leader of the eminence. But unfortunately, the Muslim leaders could not canalize the enormous pent-up energy which was released by the 1931 upheaval, particularly they failed to guide the enthusiasm of women and direct it to the fruitful channels. Surely there were at least a few of the women fighters such as Jan Ded possessed the qualities of leadership and given encouragement and opportunity, should have come to the fore. But, the few bold women who organized aforementioned demonstration and led thousands of their sisters on battlefield, achieved nothing and soon sank into oblivion.

As a result of widespread disturbances of 1931 and the grim struggle for Independence that followed it, the Maharaja appointed the Constitutional Reforms Conference [1932] and the Franchise Committee [1933] which, after prolonged enquiries and debates,

produced a constitution for the State. This was passed into law and for the first time in history, the Kashmiri people were enfranchised in 1934, a small number of women too got the vote with the advent of independence the principle of adult franchise was fully recognized by the Constituent Assemblies of India and Pakistan and like women of the sub-continent all the adult Kashmiri women secured the right irrespective of any property or educational qualifications.

For a whole decade—from 1936 to 1946—Kashmiri women took little or no part in politics but were constructively engaged in acquiring literacy and learning. When in May 1946 the National Conference, under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, embarked upon "Quit Kashmir" adventure, politically-minded Muslim women came again to the fore. They actively participated in demonstrations against the alien Dogra Rule. Important figures were Noor Gojri, Fatima, the first women who laughed at death in her love for the motherhood, Begum Abdullah and Zainab Begum both of whom belong to richer classes and were educated. Miss Mehmooda Alisha, one of the first highly educated women of Kashmir and Zainab Begum are the first Kashmiri women to discard Purdah and fighters of Quit Kashmir Movement.

It was in this context of that women in Kashmir were provided equal rights which were enshrined in the Naya Kashmir Programme that guided all the post-independence programmes in Jammu and Kashmir State. The programme was one of the earliest and important political documents in the entire Indian Sub-continent which upheld equal rights of women. With the end of Dogra Rule and dawn of independence, it was felt that that something substantially significant

could happen in favour of the destitute. But, history had something else to offer. Kashmir had to face a Tribal invasion in 1947 and, thus, another war began. After the Tribal raid, the Kashmiri women's army came into being and the first battalion of the army was named "Mukta Battalion".²⁶ Meanwhile, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir under these stirring circumstances acceded to India and signed Instrument of Accession on September 26, 1946. Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir constitutionally became an integral part of India and Fundamental Rights of Indian Constitution became applicable to the residents of Jammu and Kashmir guaranteeing, thus, women equal status.

But, as the Kashmir history witnessed a change during 1980's because of militancy, the position of women came to a very low level. Regardless of their rich contribution in every field, the women of the State have failed to get their due place in the society. They don't enjoy equal rights as the men-folk enjoy. They even are denied their lawful share in the ancestral property. The element of poverty prevents them from receiving education. The menace of dowry has made the life of women very miserable particularly in the urban areas. There are thousands of girls who cannot find a suitable match because of the inability of their parents to raise huge sums to meet dowry demands of prospective grooms.

Since the beginning of Kashmir conflict, in late 1980's, people of Kashmir in general and women in particular have been the victims in the ongoing cycle of violence and abuse. Sexual and physical violence has been appropriated by both security forces and militants in order to coerce, humiliate or punish women who are also subject to the rules and conditions imposed on

civilians in a situation of armed conflict. As a journalist observed: "women have been the worst hit in the war in Kashmir. They have been killed in crossfire, shot at in public demonstrations, blown up in grenade explosions or in shelling across the Line of Control and have been raped by security forces, by anti-government militants and by pro-government militants".²⁷ Yet their voices or experience of the conflict remains absent.

Even women in Kashmir are attacked and sometimes killed for what they wear or don't wear thus striking fear in their hearts. In Kashmir one female noted, "Both sides have guns, they shoot each other, they both die. But the problem remains"²⁸.

Women in the Kashmir insurgency have been boxed into the human rights discourses of victimhood— as victim of direct violence, of rape as a weapon of war by the security forces and of indirect violence which has made them widows, half widows of the disappeared and mothers of sons killed or orphaned. Women in Kashmir are known as symbols—grieving mother, martyr's mother and raped women²⁹.

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8. Qadri, Shafi, n—4, p—22.
9. Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, n—3, p-35. See also *Wrong of Kashmir* [Kashmir papers], p-32.
10. Mohammad Subhan was born in 1910 at Maisuma, Srinagar. He came from a barber's family. His parents had come from a nearby village and settled at Maisuma. In 1924, at the age of 14 years, he published a pamphlet against the flesh-trade and went from door-to-door and appraised the people about the happenings. He along with a Biscoe boy named Master Mohammad Sidiq watched at the gates of the prostitution centres and requested the people not to go in. He was greatly helped, in this effort, by Tyndale Biscoe who was seriously concerned about the same. Mohammad Subhan wrote and distributed pamphlets exposing the immoral traffic along with Biscoe.
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12. Neve, Ernest, *Beyond the Pirpanjal: Life among the Mountains and Valley of Kashmir*, Jay Kay Books, Srinagar, 2003, p-240.
13. Biscoe, Tyndale, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, Jay Kay Books, Srinagar, 2005, p—260.
14. *Ibid*, p-263
15. Miss Mallinson was truly a pioneer of female education and played an important role in educational and cultural development of Kashmiri Women for 40 years [1922-1962]. Female education was not the only aim in her life, her struggle was against the atrocities done to Kashmiri females. She waged a war against Child Marriage and fought for the dignity of women. It is said that Miss Mallinson intended to bequeath her skeletal remains to the School laboratory. But her students would never allow their beloved Madam's bones to be displayed publicly. Miss Mallinson deeply touched by the sentiments of her students, implored: "my dear girls! May you learn from me even when I am no more! May my bones teach you physiology!" she died in 1980.
16. Molvi Rasul Shah was born in 1854. His father's name was Mirwaiz Maulana Mohammad Yahya, who was a great teacher, reputed scholar and spent his entire life in

- disseminating Islam—its message, Hadith, Sunnah and Shariah. Molvi Rasul Shah, following the steps of his ancestors, put heart and soul in the crusade for the eradication of dirty and evil ideas polluting pious spirit of Islam. He was a towering personality who rendered yeoman service to the Muslims of Kashmir by founding "Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam", an educational institution in 1899 which threw wide open the gates of modern education. He breathed his last on Friday, 30 July, 1909. May His Soul rest in Peace! It is for his singular services that he is remembered as Sir Syed of Kashmir.
17. In honour of social reformer Harbilas Sharda, who introduced and piloted the Bill through the Central Legislature. By its provisions, the age of consent within marriage was fixed at 18 for boys and 14 for girls, and outside marriage 15 for girls. An Amendment to this Act in later day finally raised the age of girls to 15 and age of consent to outside marriage to 18.
18. Census, 1911, pp-148,211.
19. Census, 1931, p-297. See also the HAMDARD, May 15, 1938.
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The National Conference

The celebrated Valley of Kashmir, nestled securely among the Himalayas at an average height of 6,000 feet above the sea, is the Valley became a prized object of conquest for ambitious rulers of the neighboring countries. Although remote and isolated, the Valley became a prized object of conquest for ambitious rulers of the neighboring Kingdoms. It was also vulnerable to periodic occupation because of its position close to major overland routes between Central Asia and Indian Peninsula. In the last four hundred years, the Valley saw the rise and fall of numerous dynasties, including Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and Dogras. The rulers, in many cases, their governors and representatives, tended not only to neglect the welfare of the Kashmiris but also pursued a conscious policy of persecution and exploitation.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir as it exists today is the creation of Maharaja Gulab Singh. During war between the Britain and Sikhs, Gulab Singh refrained from taking sides, and, in 1846, after the Battle of Subroan, he acted as a mediator between the belligerents. The treaties thus concluded gave to the British, as equivalent of an indemnity of ten million rupees, the hilly area between the river Beas and Indus. Out of this ceded territory, the British under

the Treaty of Amritsar, transferred to Gulab Singh, for a sum of seven and half million rupees, all the hilly and mountainous area situated to the east of Indus and west of the Ravi which included the Valley of Kashmir. It was, thus, towards the end of the 19th century that the State of Jammu and Kashmir came into shape. The authority of the Maharaja was extended from Chitral in the north to Katua in south and Aksiachin in the east to Kohala in the west. The State, therefore, became the most important frontier region of India.¹

The Treaty of Amritsar was signed at Amritsar on March 16, 1846 by Mr. F. Currief Drevet, Major Hengy Montgomery Lawrence, on behalf of Lord Harding, and Gulab Singh, in person. The Treaty of Amritsar was no better than a Charter of Serfdom for the helpless and unfortunate people of Kashmir. The Britishers sold Kashmir along with its two million people to a "bigot". It was estimated that the inhabitants were "at twenty five shillings a head, the most extensive transaction in the slave trade of modern times".² Dr. Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal rightly said about the sale deed:

*Badi saba agar-ba Geneva guzar kuni,
Harfi zama bi mujlisi akwam bazgo,
Dehqan wa kisht wa jo wa bayaban farokhtand,
Quomay farokhtand wa chi arzan farokhtand.
[O morning breeze, if thou passeth by
Geneva, convey an appeal from us to the
League of Nations; they sold the farmer,
the field, the rivulet and the Vale; they
sold a nation and how cheaply!]*

The Dogra Rule like its predecessors was autocratic in nature and character. The Dogras believed in the principle of personal rule and had established a feudalistic political system. It was undemocratic,

irresponsible and despotic. They ruled the State for one hundred years from 1846 to 1947. During this long period of time, the State saw four Princes³, the last being, Maharaja Hari Singh who ruled from 1925 to 1947.⁴

The new rulers also did nothing for the welfare of the common people. They continued to treat the Kashmiris with much the same contempt as their Mughal, Afghan and Sikh predecessors. Gulab Singh laid the foundation of a centralized government in which the authority of the ruler was assured by force and the revenue came punctually.⁵ Indeed, there were even new abuses to be shouldered, such as the imposition of notorious 'Begar'; a form of forced labour.⁶ Beggar was so harshly enforced that the very word was a constant terror for the poor in Kashmir.⁷

Even the publication of newspapers without the permission of the Maharaja was banned in 1906. The Maharaja prohibited the entry of political literature into the State and prescribed the pamphlets 'the first step towards independence and 'the present condition of Indian nationalism'. A similar ban was imposed on newspapers vide Ordinance No. 1 of 1914; the State Government secured the control of press during the Great War. Russian currency in the possession of certain traders in Kashmir was confiscated. Plight of Kashmiri people, in general, and Muslim, in particular, had gone from bad to worse, prayers were made that "His Majesty, by his royal grace, may be pleased to extend to the people of Kashmir, the new light of equality and self determination".⁸ Thus, the autocratic rule of Dogras in Kashmir can be well illustrated through the statement of Sir Alboin Bannerji⁹ given by him in 1929:

Jammu and Kashmir State is labouring under many disadvantages with a large Mohammadan popu-

lation absolutely illiterate laboring under poverty and very low economic conditions of living in the villages and practically governed like dumb driven cattle. There is no touch between government and the people, no suitable opportunity for representing grievances, and the administrative machinery itself requires overhauling from top to bottom to bring it up to the modern conditions of efficiency. It has, at present, little or no sympathy with the peoples' wants and grievances.¹⁰

Under such prevailing conditions the Kashmiris had failed to launch an organized struggle against the oppressive rule of the Dogras. However, when the oppression crossed the limits, the illiterate people, in general, and working class, in particular, showed passive reactions and sometimes even revolted openly, as for instance the Shawl-balf Revolt of 1865 and revolt of workers in Silk Factory in 1924. But these revolts collapsed as they lacked an organized character.¹¹ As already mentioned, the ban on the formation of societies or associations even for social or religious purposes was strict. Even in 1921, the Maharaja was very reluctant to grant permission for the formation of a society dedicated solely to the teaching of Holy Quran. While granting permission, the police was ordered "to watch that the Anjuman does not take part in political matters". Ultimately, permission was granted for the setting up of the Anjuman-e-nusrat-ul-Islam under the chairmanship of Mirwaiz Rasul Shah and Anjuman-i-Islamia under General Farman Ali, with Lala Hans Raj Dogra pleaded as Secretary, in

Jammu. Similarly, the Arya Samaj had also been allowed to function. The government took every step to stop the wave of political awakening that had engulfed the sub-continent in the shape of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements from reaching the ears of the people of the State. Even long before this, the visitors were closely watched lest they should communicate the rising tide of freedom in British India and on the slightest suspicion, were they turned out of the State.

However, it appears that the growing unrest was coming to the surface and secret meetings were being held to organize a political movement because as early as 1914, the Government enforced the prevention of seditious meetings, likely to promote seditions or to cause a disturbance of public tranquility.¹² But, the formal signs of political awakening and awareness among the people of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly among the Muslims of Kashmir, were noticed during the time of Maharaja Hari Singh, the last ruler of the Dogra raj. The period between 1925 to 1930 may be described as the dawn of political awakening in Kashmir, when a number of factors combined to arouse the masses/Muslims out of their political apathy and inertia, for which they had paid an unusually heavy price.¹³ The factors, on the one hand, were the increase in the number of young men educated in schools teaching English, there grew an acute bitterness between the inhabitants of the State and the Punjabi officials who had occupied every position of the advantage in the administrative set up and on the other hand, the support that Kashmiris received from the Muslims of other Indian states especially from the Muslims of Lahore (now Pakistan).¹⁴

The educated Muslims, who had returned from the

various Indian Universities, found no job in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It was a strange coincidence that with the return of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah and other graduates from Aligarh, the Civil Service Recruitment Board, which had been recently set up, framed certain rules which do appear to have been intended to prevent the entry of Muslims. Sixty per cent vacancies were to be filled in by the Government without any reference to the Board; as to the remaining forty percent, every candidate was required to deposit a sum of rupees fifty as fee, the maximum age for recruitment was fixed at 22 years. It was also made obligatory for an applicant to possess a "good family background" and even if a Muslim was lucky enough to cross all these hurdles, the government reserved the right to reject him without assigning any reasons whatsoever. It was felt that the devices were invented to give a legal cover to the policy of denying them a due representation. It is also interesting to point out that almost the entire group of unemployed Muslim graduates or double graduates was above 22 years of age and, therefore, clearly stood debarred from the recruitment to any respectable service'.¹⁵

As a result, the educated Muslim young men began to organize themselves. They founded a Reading Room in Fateh Kadal [Srinagar] and organized a party in Srinagar consisting of Muhammad Rajab as its president, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah as Secretary and Pirzada Ghulam Rasool, Ahmad Shah Fazili, Hakim Ghulam Murtaza and Mufti Jalal-ud-din as its self-selected members. The Reading Room Party of young Muslim graduates instead of protesting against the recruitment policy highlighted the repressive measures adopted by Hari Singh's Government against the Muslims of Kashmir. They started a violent

campaign against the Hindu Maharaja in the columns of "Inquilab"—a daily published at Lahore. Entry of this daily into the State was banned. But, other new weeklies and dailies like "Kashmiri Musalman", "Kashmir Muzloom" and "Muktoob-i-Kashmir" soon poured in the State from the Punjab.¹⁶ In fact, Reading Room Party was a platform in the garb of which they wanted to bring all the educated young together for devising ways and means to fight out injustice done to the Muslim community, in general, and the educated Muslim youth, in particular.¹⁷ It not only made the members of this party popular among the people but also accelerated the pace of consciousness among the Kashmiri Muslims.¹⁸

In early 1930's many developments took place one after the another that helped in mobilizing masses openly for which the Reading Room Party had been waiting anxiously since its inception. These events were:

- I. *Ban on Eid Khutba in Jammu on April 29, 1931*, what happened was that Muslims were busy in a prayer meeting on Eid Day, a sub-inspector of police namely Babu Khem Chand tried to stop the Imam from reciting Khutba [sermon] warned the Imam to stop delivering a political speech. As a result, hue and cry was raised throughout the State against the incident.
- II. *The ban on Friday prayers* in a village of Jammu by the supporters of Dogra rule. This created strong resentment and the Muslim leaders didn't lose the chance to cash it for mobilizing the people against the Raj [rule] and came openly and delivered fierce speeches against the government.¹⁹

III. *Tauheen-i-Quran* (sacrilege of the Holy Quran): it was an immediate cause which ignited an inextinguishable fire of revolution for the first time in the history of Jammu and Kashmir State. It so happened that on the morning of June 4, 1931 at an hour when, according to stand orders, all the bedding should have been rolled up and put away by the constables of the jail guards at the Central Jail, Jammu, a Muslim constable namely Fazldad was found sitting on his bedding reading the Quran. The Head Constable, Labbha Ram, remonstrated with him and rolled up his bedding. When he threw the bedding on his box, the Punjsura (a collection of five chapters of Holy Quran) fell upon the ground.²⁰

It was during this period that a stranger by name Maulana Azad Subhani, the priest of Jamia Masjid of Calcutta [now Kolkatta] appeared on the scene unexpectedly at Srinagar Reading Room. "He was the top leader of the pan-Islamic movement". He appreciated the working of members of the Reading Room Party, incited them to launch an agitation against Hari Singh and disappeared from Kashmir surreptitiously.²¹

It was at this juncture that yet another outsider by name Abdul Qadeer²² appeared on the scene. In a meeting at Khankah-i-Muallah on June 21, 1931 organised by young men of Reading Room Party in which Abdul Qadeer joined the audience, and when it concluded and the leaders left the lawns of the shrine, he came on the dais and delivered a speech against Maharaja Hari Singh. He highlighted the repressive

measures and advocated violence. He said, "Oh you Muslims! Time has come that you retaliate sharply. Memoranda and requests will neither ease the repression and tyranny nor will solve the issue of disrespect of the Holy Quran. You stand on your legs and fight against the tyranny..."²³ As a result, Abdul Qadeer was arrested on June 21, 1931 under 152-A of the Indian Penal Code. On July 13, 1931 his trial was to take place in the Central Jail Srinagar. Before the trial started, a large crowd gathered outside the prison walls. When the Session Judge and other officials arrived, the mob became uncontrolled and there took place a face to face confrontation between the people and the police. The Magistrate on duty ordered to open fire, which resulted into cold blooded massacre of twenty-two Muslims and scores of demonstrators received bullet injuries.²⁴ Many leaders including Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah were arrested, curfew and martial law were imposed in Srinagar. People defied the curfew and martial law by bringing out hundreds of processions which then led to more indiscriminate firing and deaths. Telephone and telegraph communications from Srinagar were suspended, roads from Srinagar were closed, but two messengers managed to reach Lahore and met Maulana Abdul Majid Salik, the editor of the "Inquilab", and Syed Mohsin Shah (already exiled from the State by the Maharaja for his part in the freedom struggle). Together they went to Sir Muhammad Iqbal, the spearhead of the Punjabi-Kashmir Muslim Movement in sympathy with Kashmiri struggle. It was on the request of Dr. Iqbal that Mirza Bashir-du-din Mahmud Ahmad took the initiative in organizing the work of the 'All India Kashmir Committee' starting from 1931. At Garhi Habibullah Rest house, a meeting was

arranged between Mirza Bashir-ud-din and Sheikh Abdullah in which it was decided that the latter should be the leader of the movement and Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas Khan, secretary. Funds were collected from all over India for the Kashmir cause.²⁵

Thus, in early stages of the mass movement the need for the formation of a State-wide political organization was keenly felt. But, in the absence of the freedom of association, no steps could be taken to meet the need.²⁶ And it was on March 12, 1932, the Maharaja, on the recommendation of the Galancy Commission²⁷ Report, announced the grant of the rights to freedom of press and platform to the people of the state. This announcement had two-fold importance:

- I) It recognized the legitimacy of the demand for basic political and civil liberties which the people deserved, and
- II) It was the first major victory reaped by his Muslim subjects as a result of their revolution.²⁸

Thus, in order to launch an organized struggle encouraged by mass support, the Kashmiri Muslim leadership thought of forming a political organization for the purpose. Accordingly, they consulted the Jammu leaders as well as the leaders of Kashmir Committee who assured them of their full co-operation in this regard.²⁹ A committee was set up for the purpose to give a practical shape to the idea. It drafted a constitution of the proposed organization and decided to name it as "All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference".³⁰

According to Maulana Muhammad Syed Masoodi, the decision to form a party and name it the Muslim Conference was taken in the Central Jail, Srinagar, in course of discussions that he had with the Sheikh

Muhammad Abdullah, while both were internal together. Thus, in the year 1932—historically its inception was established—the venue for its inception was the Pather Masjid at Zaina Kadal. On this occasion, it is believed, that about three lakhs of people attended the convention.³¹

The Muslim Conference committed itself to the following:

- a) To organize the Muslims of the State and secure them their rights.
- b) To struggle for the emancipation of their economic and cultural lot.
- c) To liberate them from the disabilities they laboured under.³²

A convention of this party was held on October 14-16, 1932, at Pather Masjid, Srinagar, under the Chairmanship of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah. The arrangements for this convention were made by Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah, Maulvi Hamdani and Maulvi Abdullah. The leaders of the newly-formed Party demanded the implementation of the recommendations of Galancy Commission.³³

A platform, fifteen feet high from the ground, was constructed in the spacious ground of the Masjid on which sat about two hundred representatives and about a hundred press representatives and observers. The ground adjacent to the Mosque was later utilized for the construction of Mujahid Manzil, the Party Headquarter, was converted into a part of the pendal to accommodate the unprecedented audience. Hundreds of houseboats were hired to house the delegates. The Committee which made the arrangements for the conference and drafted the constitution, also adopted a party flag which consisted

of a green cloth, representing Muslim faith, with a crescent and star which was also the flag of the All India Muslim League and which now, in addition to a piece of white cloth representing minorities, is National Flag of Pakistan. The flag hoisting ceremony was performed on 14th by Waliullah Zain-ul-Abedin, a representative of All India Kashmir Committee.³⁴

Thus, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah with the support of the Reading Room Party organizers, Sadiq Muhammad and Mirza Afzal Beigh, Mirwaiz Kashmir and Mirwaiz Hamdani, inaugurated the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in 1932. In his presidential address at the first session on October 15, 1932, Sheikh Abdullah called on the Kashmiri Muslims to unite, gain education and be prepared to serve notice to the government as well as to participate in assembly elections as soon as they were called. At the same time, he recalled the past glory of Kashmiris, which was lost when they became the slaves of non-Kashmiri rulers. Emphasizing that the Kashmiri Muslim Movement was non-communal, he went to accuse the administration of holding communal views, which had led them to insult the Quran and injure the religious feeling of Kashmiri Muslims.³⁵

Mirwaiz Kashmir Yousuf Shah was the first to raise the banner of revolt against Abdullah's ambivalent politics. He broke away from the Muslim Conference in 1933 and formed his own political organization, the Azad Muslim Party Conference.³⁶ The first and last session of this party was held at the Jamia Masjid.³⁷

In the meantime, the Maharaja had accepted the proposals of the Franchise Committee that recommended an elected legislature for the State and announced the foundation of the State Assembly in

1934, which was to be known as the Praja Sabha, or the Subjects' Assembly. The Praja Sabha was to have 75 members, 33 to be elected and 42 to be nominated. The elected members were to be chosen based on the system of separate electorates for communities, with 21 Muslims, 10 Hindus, and 02 Sikhs, through a limited franchise. Candidates for the membership to the Assembly had to be at least 25 years of age and literate in either Persian or Devangari Script. The administration and government of the State remained under the control of a Council of Ministers presided over by the Prime Minister. Furthermore, the Maharaja retained the ultimate political power in that the executive was responsible to him and not to assembly. Sheikh Abdullah recognized that the Praja Sabha was a powerless body. Thus, he decided to contest the elections and in September 1934 elections to the Praja Sabha, the Muslim Conference won all the 21 Muslim seats of the Assembly which confirmed its popularity among the Muslim masses.³⁸ The State Legislature started functioning in the same month.

It was in early 1935 that Abdullah and Prem Nath Bazaz felt that time had come to make the first move in the implementation of their schemes for re-orientating Kashmir politics on secular lines. As a result, on August 01, 1935, they jointly started a weekly journal, "the Hamdard", in Urdu to popularise the ideology and to lay the foundation of progressive nationalism in the State. The inauguration of the first issue of journal was performed by Dr. Saif-ud-Din Kitchlu at Hazuri Bagh, Srinagar.

In the same year, Sheikh Abdullah in an appeal to the 'men of all communities' had said:

My fight is for the emancipation of my own country. Let us all rise above

petty communal bickering and work jointly for the welfare of the masses. I appeal to my Hindu brethren not to entertain imaginary fears and doubts. Let us assure them that their rights shall not be jeopardized if they join hands with the Mussalmans.³⁹

On May 08, 1936, the Muslim Conference under the presidentship of Chaudry Abbas observed a "Responsible Government Day" through out the State. Both Muslims and non-Muslims took part in the function. The meetings were presided over by some Hindu and Sikh leaders. This development made it clear to Muslims that the Muslim Conference "should be transformed into a national body, and this pre-supposed that the concept and ideological content of nationalism be made known to the Muslim masses..."⁴⁰

Then in 1937, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah met Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru for the first time who was on his way from Lahore to the North-West Frontier Province [NWFP]. Sheikh Abdullah accompanied him and spent several days in the Frontier where he was introduced to Badshah Khan (Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan) and others. According to Sheikh Abdullah, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru took interest in Kashmiri's movement and suggested that we (Kashmiri Muslims) should throw open our membership to members of every community. Sheikh M. Abdullah suggested to Badshah Khan and Nehru to visit Kashmir.⁴¹ Then, at a press conference at Amritsar, Abdullah said:

Communal friction in Kashmir is to large extent the result of the propaganda made by Communal Leaders of Punjab. We want that the people of Punjab should not interfere

in our internal affairs. My future work will be to work on the principles of Congress (Indian National Congress) and I want to lay a foundation of such an organization soon I return home.⁴²

One of the vital and important developments in Kashmir politics was the emergence of new forces such as the Kashmir Youth League, the Mazdoor (Labour) Sabha, the Kisan (Peasantry) Sabha, Student Federation and various other trade unions. The common current running through all these Sabhas, associations and unions was the message of propagation and preaching of the principle of secularism, nationalism and also, the benefits of a joint struggle. Their role and performance in the freedom struggle were, therefore, a great contribution to the secularization of politics as well as to the movement in the state.⁴³

The sixth annual session of the Muslim Conference was held in Jammu from 25—27 March, 1938. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah was elected the president. S.M. Amin, MLA, headed the Reception Committee. Addressing the session, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah said:

It is essential that all those people who suffer from the present system of government should get an opportunity to join in the struggle for the achievement of responsible government. Who are these people? They are not only Muslims but Hindus, Sikhs, Untouchables and Buddhists, nay, all citizens of the State. Some Muslims have a misconception that all

non-Muslims are living a life of comfort. This is not correct. Only a few thousand among them stand protected against inequalities and disabilities otherwise the rest of them are like you, poor, indebted, illiterate and suffer from other excesses. The demand for responsible government is not meant for eighty percent Muslims alone but for all inhabitants of the State; therefore, it is necessary to march together with the twenty percent non-Muslims.⁴⁴

It was in the same session that Sheikh M. Abdullah spoke in favour of the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, which generated heated discussions and confrontations in the ranks of the Muslim Conference leadership. It was Maulana Muhammad Saeed who proposed that the name of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference be changed into the All Jammu and Kashmir Political Conference. The mover of the resolution wanted the word "Muslim" to be deleted from the name. The main purpose of this change, according to the Maulana, was to smoothen the way for the establishment of an organization which could provide to both Muslims and non-Muslims a common platform in future. It was supported by Raja Muhammad Akbar from Mirpur but was opposed by A.R. Sagar, S.M. Amin and Abdul Majid Qureshi.⁴⁵ On June 24, 1938, Sheikh M. Abdullah placed a resolution embodying his views about the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, the ideology of which was in conformity with that of the Indian National Congress. The

resolution of the Working Committee was reproduced as follows:

...the time has now come when all the progressive forces in the Country should be rallied under one banner to fight for achievement of responsible government... Accordingly, it was recommended that ... in the forthcoming Annual Session of the Conference the name and the constitution of the organization be so altered and amended that all such people who desire to participate in this political struggle may become members of the Conference irrespective of their Caste, Creed or religion.⁴⁶

While efforts for bringing about the two communities together on the same platform and under one political organisation were on, the government became disturbed. On August 05, 1938, the people, irrespective of their race and religion, began to join the function, the government exercised repression on those participating in those public meetings. With the objective to bring about division among the Nationalist-oriented ranks. But, the government was surprised when on August 29, twelve Hindu, Sikh and Muslim leaders issued manifesto, known the "National Demand" including:

- i) Responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharaja.
- ii) Establishment of an elected legislature.
- iii) Elementary and basic rights of citizenship.

all people living in the State.

- iv) Adult franchise and joint electorate.
- v) Constitutional safeguards for minorities regarding the protection, preservation, and growth of their educational, linguistic, religious, cultural, social, political and economic rights.

The Government, again in order to silence the growing intensity of the movement began to use oppressive methods. The State troops ruthlessly beat the processionists and arrested many political workers as well as men of respect. Twenty-three persons were arrested on September 09, 1938 including Mirza Afzal Beigh, Sofi Mohd. Akbar and Mr. Mohd. Maqbool Sherwani.⁴⁷

A meeting of the General Council of the Muslim Conference was held on April 26, 1939 for the purposes of considering and, thereby, approving the resolution already passed by the Working Committee regarding re-naming of the Muslim Conference. Accordingly, the historical and important session of the Muslim Conference was convened at Pather Masjid, Srinagar on June 10 and 11, 1939, which was attended by 178 delegates out of 200 which was the total strength of the General Council. "The Session was presided over by late Gh. Mohd. Sadiq. Moulvi Muhammad Syed Masoodi moved the resolution: the resolution was discussed, debated and carded like wool by the delegates. Finally, it was put to vote. 175 delegates voted in favour of the change and only four delegates stood against it⁴⁸. The resolution was passed amidst loud cheers and jubilation.⁴⁹

Sheikh M. Abdullah was elected its president. Jialal Kilam and Kayshap Bandhu also joined this new party, which consolidated its claim for Secularism, Socialism and Nationalism. Undoubtedly, the leadership

intended to present the conference as an organization of the downtrodden classes. Its flag e.g. was red in color with a white plough in the Centre, representing socialist revolution for the Kashmiri Peasantry.⁵⁰

The secularization of Kashmir politics and the re-definition of the goal helped to forge close links between the Indian National Congress and the National Conference. Jawaharlal Nehru said in February 1939:

As a matter of fact, the two movements progressively developed on national lines and in Kashmir I am glad to say a number of wise and far-seeing Hindus and Sikhs threw their weight on the side of the popular movement and supported the "national demand" which asked for responsible government.⁵¹

Naturally, this development set many others to worry. The State Government left no stone unturned to prevent a General Session of the Muslim Conference but all in vain. On the other hand, the minority in the Conference which believed in keeping the politics of Kashmir on communal lines or in forging link with the Muslim League in India was upset by the secularization of politics. Consequently, within a year Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas with few followers left the party.⁵²

The first annual session of the National Conference was held in Baramullah from 27-29 September, 1940, under the presidentship of Sardar Budh Singh. On the first day, the number of the delegates wasn't very large due to heavy rains. On the second day, the opening session had, therefore, to be shifted to the Jamia Masjid while the delegates' Meeting was held at the residence of Saif-ud-din Shah. The National

Conference adopted many resolutions:

- 1) Grant of propriety rights to tillers of land.
- 2) Replacement of land revenue by a sort of income—tax or, in the alternative, to assess land revenue on the same scale as was used in the levying of the income tax.
- 3) Demand for the setting up of a separate department to look after the welfare of labourers who migrated to the plains during winter for seasonal employment.

In a meeting of the Working Committee held in Jammu towards the end of January 1942, it was decided to launch a campaign for the relief of the poor who were badly hit by the rising cost of living. Therefore, the National Conference wedded itself to the secular ideology and it was never prepared to accept any kind of reactionary ideology, be it the Muslim League or the Hindu Maha Sabha. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah had gone to the extent of saying, "...if to silence my opponents I have to take up a sword, I will not hesitate to do so".⁵³

The politics of the state was, by and large, determined by the National Conference. The National Conference continued to work and prepared a strong cadre having a base in the people. In the meanwhile, Maharaja Hari Singh, on July 12, 1943, appointed an Enquiry Commission to propose reforms in the political, economic and administrative system. It included two members of the National Conference—G.M. Sadiq and Mirza Muhammad Afazal Beg. The party was encouraged to co-operate with the Commission by the statement of Maharaja on the proposal of Cripps Mission which had called upon the Princes of India to prove their patriotism. He had added, "Freedom should be our aim; freedom from

restrictions on suppression and repression".

While still confirming its thrust in the good intentions of His Highness, the National Conference was not satisfied with the working of the Commission. Therefore, it directed its two members to withdraw from the Commission and decided to send the memorandum to the Maharaja directly⁵⁴. The Conference put this responsibility on the shoulders of G.M. Sadiq. However, the National Conference, in order to give a practical shape to this idea, invited from its members and other eminent personalities and common people, their opinions, articles, suggestions, all in writing. When a bulk of such material was collected, it was sifted and all good things accepted, compiled and given a proper shape. It was then prepared into a well arranged document with the help of a communist leader, B.L.P. Bedi and his wife Freda, who translated the document into English and mixed his own ideological substance with the material.⁵⁵ It was this document which came to be known as "Naya Kashmir Manifesto". However, another view given by C. Bilqees Taseer, that the Bedis (Bedi and his wife Freda), were busy in motivating the student community and the (New Kashmir) Manifesto was drafted from their Model Town hut before 1944 by those involved.⁵⁶ However, the draft was adopted at the National Conference's historical annual session held at Sopore (Baramullah) on 29 and 30 September, 1944 with a unanimous vote.

The New Kashmir Manifesto as divided into two parts:

- 1) The Constitution of the State; and
- 2) The National Economic Plan.

The first part deals with Citizenship, National Assembly, Council of Ministers, ruler, justice, Local

Administration and the national language. The Second is divided into:

- a) Production,
- b) Transport,
- c) Distribution,
- d) Utility Services, and
- e) Currency and Finance.⁵⁷

The Manifesto was presented to the Maharaja Hari Singh by Sheikh M. Abdullah near Pather Masjid or Mujahid Manzil when he had come from the war front in 1944. The foreword of Naya Kashmir Manifesto was given by Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah as:

"In our New Kashmir, we shall build again the men and women of our State who have been dwarfed by servitude and create a people worthy of our glorious motherland".⁵⁸

Thus, National Conference's political manifesto has become almost a Bible for the party. This policy document envisaged a plan for an all-sided advance along all avenues of human activity regulated in a democratic manner on a country-wide scale, covering agriculture, industry, transport and public utility services. Without any doubt, Naya Kashmir has remained a major policy document of the party and even today the party unequivocally pledges itself to the ideals contained in the Manifesto.⁵⁹

The New Kashmir Plan was a tall order even on people, never mind in practice. Most importantly, not only did it give the Maharaja a solemn promise that he would continue to exercise the right of the general control over the administration of the State, it did not delineate the status of Kashmir within the future political structure of Independent India. The plan seemed to assume that the State of Jammu and Kashmir

would be autonomous regardless of the political entities that replaced British Rule. Sheikh Abdulla's speech during the National Conference Session which adopted the Manifesto as its future programme did not address, or was at best ambiguous, on this issue.⁶⁰

The attempt by the National Conference to boost its popularity among Kashmiris through the adoption of the revolutionary Naya Kashmir was only partially successful. Prem Nath Bazaz dismissed it as an "interesting though thoughtlessly drafted document, envisaging the establishment of a communist State yet, opportunisticly enough, it guaranteed the perpetuation of the alien Dogra Rule in Kashmir."⁶¹

Mirwiaz Yousuf Shah, predictably labeled Naya Kashmir as anti-Islamic⁶², while Kashmiri Pandits represented by Yuvak Sabha also voiced their concern against the plan which threatened to dislodge their position within the administration of the State.⁶³ According to him, Naya Kashmir ignored the interests of the minorities by attempting to further the rule of the majority. The National Conference, also predictably, responded by labeling both the followers of Mirwaiz and the Yuvak Sabha reactionaries who were determined to dislodge the Kashmiri people from path of freedom to the guise of religion. P.N. Bazaz was lampooned almost daily in pro-National Conference newspapers as a venal individual who could be bribed for his political loyalties.

However, it was not just the so-called reactionaries who opposed Naya Kashmir, Lala Bansi Suri, a prominent Gandhian member of the National Conference, resigned from the party in the wake of the introduction of the Plan. "Naya Kashmir has some merits", he admitted, "but it has many more shortcomings from the national point of view".

According to him, the plan did not take into account the principle of proportionate representation according to population, and by granting Urdu the sole status as the Official Language it had further proved its anti-national character.⁶⁴

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"When a man is seized for this form of 'Begar' his wife and children hang upon him, weeping talking it almost for granted that they will never see him more. A gang of these poor creatures, heavily laden with grain, toiling along the desert guage between Astore and Gilgit, on burning summer day, urged on by sepoy squad, is perhaps as pitiable as spectacle as any to be seen on the roads of Siberia. But these were not convicts or criminals, they were Mussalman farmers, harmless subjects of the Maharaja."
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Role of National Conference in Women Empowerment:

An Analysis

Kashmiri women, as discussed earlier, have seen many ups and downs and have faced many challenges with a great courage. They have played a very important role in the development of political, social, economic and cultural aspects of the state of J&K. They have been the companions of men during freedom struggle and have sacrificed a lot for the given cause. The J&K National Conference has made tireless efforts to give boost to women's sense of empowerment in the state. To quote G.M. Fazili, a contemporary of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and a freedom fighter, "It is only because of the National Conference that women in Kashmir gained a dignified status in the society."¹ Though the Muslim Conference was a first organized political movement of the State but it failed to accommodate and promote women voice within its fold. It was the National Conference under the dynamic leadership of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah that tried not only to address the women concerns but also provided them a space to represent themselves. It was this party that helped women to come out of the darkness of ignorance and contributed to the development of the society by providing a vibrant platform to the women. It got women involved

in the ongoing freedom struggle and socialized them for participation in the decision-making processes. It was through the encouragement which women received from the National Conference leadership that they gradually became aware of their rights and status in the society. "As the time passed, they progressed with their march towards empowerment and the National Conference has played a very important role in this direction".² Throughout its functioning the National Conference has passed several resolutions (in the Party Sessions) and legislations (in Government) and formulated many schemes to ensure the overall development of women and first movement in this direction was National Conference's "Naya Kashmir Manifesto" adopted in 1944. Naya Kashmir Manifesto includes a special charter for empowerment of women sub-titled as Women's Charter. This programme is one of the earliest and important political documents in the whole subcontinent of India which upheld equal rights of women. In fact, the directive principles of the State Policy with regard to the rights of women in the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir are based on Naya Kashmir's Women Charter. The Directive Principles of State Policy state that:

"The state shall endeavour to secure of all women:

- a) The right to equal pay for equal work;
- b) the right to maternity benefits as well as adequate medical care in all employment;
- c) the right to reasonable maintenance extending to the cases of married women who have been divorced or abandoned;
- d) the right to full equality in all social,

- e) educational, political and legal matters; social protection against discourtesy, deformations, hooliganism and other forms of misconduct.³

A. Political Participation

The Kashmiri people were enfranchised in 1934 for the first time and it was done on a very limited scale. As far as women were concerned, the right to vote was limited to those who have passed the middle standard or an equivalent examination.⁴ The excuse for its limited scale as given by the Franchise Commission was, "The inclusion of women voters would increase the administrative difficulties of the election".⁵ But with the establishment of the popular government headed by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the State elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1951 were based on universal franchise. The part X of the constitution of J&K dealt with the election in the state. It proposed the right of women to elect and to be elected in all institutions on the basis of equality with men and also the grant of equal rights to women in all the fields of the national life including that of services in the state.⁶ In addition, the provision to Section 47 provides that if the Governor is of the opinion that women are not adequately represented in the assembly, he may nominate not more than two women to be members thereof.⁷

This was a unique feature of the J&K constitution to ensure participation of women in decision-making processes. In an interview a senior leader of National Conference, Mr. Abdul Rahim Rather said, "If the National Conference comes to power in the next elections (Assembly Elections 2008); it will make 50% reservation for women in politics compulsory to let

more and more women come out of their homes and take active participation in the state affairs and nation building".⁸ However, time will show how far the National Conference is able to meet these commitments.

Women Wing

It was in 1950's when National Conference again came to the rescue and upliftment of the women folk and established the J&K National Conference Women Wing. Since then the Women's Wing has been working tirelessly for bringing women at par with men in the male-dominated society. An effort was being made to involve women in the political process, the main purpose of the wing was to compare the level of awareness of political and educational rights among rural and urban women and to study the awareness of political rights as a function in part of socio-economic status and ethnicity. Moreover women activists and workers of National Conference were entitled to hold public office and exercise all public functions without any discrimination at grass-root level. Women activists of J & K National Conference made more efforts to interact directly with the vast majority of women in the villages and awaken their political consciousness and encourage them to exercise their franchise. The J&K NATIONAL Conference Women's Wing fought for Women's equality of franchise with men ardently for a long time by a dedicated minority against heavy resistance by the majority. Conventions on the political and educational rights of women were organized from time to time by the women activists aimed at granting the women's rights. Women face multiple hurdles and found it difficult to participate in the political process that has hitherto been male-

dominated. The major reason for this gender specificity is that women are less mobile than men. They have domestic responsibilities which put limits on time they can spend in such process but consistent efforts have been made by women activists of National Conference over a period of time to engender the political process, institutions and issues that are critical to this process. The political Women's Wing has created a favorable environment for women of Jammu and Kashmir by which they are entitled to vote in all elections...Panchayat, Municipality, Assembly and Parliament elections on equal terms with men without any discrimination and this resulted in hundreds of women gaining entry in National Conference at rural as well as urban levels. This transformation has widely recognized the women in Jammu and Kashmir and framed a structure of women's wing at provincial, district, block and halqa levels.⁹

Structure\ Constitution of National Conference Women's Wing

The J&K National Conference women's wing constitutes of provincial, District, Block and Halqa committees/ Bodies:-

1. Provincial body:

At State level the provincial body comprises of two provinces i.e. Jammu and Kashmir which consists of two provincial presidents for each province, vice-provincial president, provincial secretary, joint provincial secretary, Treasurer and 32 members.

2. District Body:

It comprises of District Committees which consist of district President for each District

at all district levels, Vice-District President, Secretary, joint Secretary, Treasurer and 32 members.

3. **Block Committees:**

It comprises of Block Presidents for each Block at block levels, Vice-Block Presidents, Secretary, joint Secretary, Treasurer and 31 members.

4. **Halqa Committee:**

It comprises of Halqa president for each Halqa at Halqa level, vice Halqa president, secretary, joint secretary, Treasurer and 31 members.

Aims and objectives of J&K National Conference Women's Wing

Some aims and objectives which would help the women of Jammu and Kashmir to improve their status and also protect their rights are as under:-

1. The education level of women both in rural and urban areas is low. So adult education should be provided to the women folk with the help of local leaders especially women leaders
2. To remove the cultural constraints which bind women to the four walls of the house.
3. To aware women about the ways by which they can protect their rights.
4. To involve more and more women in political processes. When women are at the helm of affairs they will give more attention to the women related problems which otherwise men folk ignore.
5. To motivate Government for initiating maximum schemes for the welfare and empowerment of women.¹⁰

B. Big Landed Estates Abolition Act

After assuming power in 1947, the National Conference in 1950's took a revolutionary step which changed the whole society, in general, and women, in particular. This revolutionary step was 'Big Landed Estates Abolition Act, the Magna Charta of Peasants, passed on October 17, 1950. This act transferred all land to the peasants and abolished the practice of landlords in the State. The implementation of this Act and subsequent grant of property right changed the socio-economic scenario of the State to a great extent. The landless workers who had lived at the mercy of landlords began work in the fields as owners under this 'Land to Tiller' scheme. The peasants became the real owners of the land and consequently women began to live a dignified life. Women were the most vulnerable group and they were exploited both physically and psychologically at the hands of the feudal landlords. The moment the Act was passed and put to practice, the women achieved a freedom from the shackles of land-lords forever.

"This act empowered people economically and women began to live a decent life and started to take balanced diet. They started to join educational institutions and began to think about their social upliftment".¹¹

C. Education

The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has done a tremendous job in spreading education in the State, in general, and among women, in particular. The orthodox society didn't allow girls to receive education. In fact, the Muslim community was highly illiterate. To end this menace, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah started a system of Compulsory education

known as "*Jabria Taileem*" (forced education) at Widow Palace (presently Women's College, Srinagar). It was the National Conference who established the first Women's colleges both in Srinagar and Anantnag and spread a wide net of schools at primary, secondary and senior secondary levels in every corner of the State to disseminate knowledge and lead people from darkness to light. The present status of education could be achieved "only after the tireless efforts of the National Conference and more importantly through the personal concern of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah".¹²

The literacy rate of female in the 1940's was negligible. According to 1951 Census, the total literacy rate in the State was 18.3 per cent. In 1961, it slipped down to 11.83 per cent with 16.97 per cent and 04.26 per cent of male and female respectively. According to Census 2001, the female literacy level in the State has risen to 41.82 per cent.

**Literacy Rate in Jammu and Kashmir
(1951-2001)**

Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991*	2001
Total	18.30	11.83	18.58	26.67	36.0	54.46
Male	N.A.	16.97	28.75	36.29	N.A.	65.75
Female	N.A.	04.26	09.28	15.88	N.A.	41.82

*estimated figure as (in 1991) census could not be held due to prevailing turmoil.

One of the most revolutionary steps taken by the National Conference to empower women in the knowledge Sector was 50 per cent reservation for women in Professional Courses under SRO 26 (1988) of Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The fifty percent reservation in Medical and Engineering

Courses has immensely benefitted women in the State. The obvious indication of this reservation and other related schemes is that we see a good number of women doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers etc. in the service of mankind in the State.

D. Legislations

Laws are always made to address the lacunas of the social set up. Being an orthodox society, women were denied their rights at all levels. Women were highly backward and under-developed. It gave rise to the need to frame laws for their development—mental and otherwise. The laws and schemes made particularly for women have greatly influenced their lives. It is because of these laws "we see a good number of educated women in our society living a dignified life and occupying even key positions in administration, education, health, judiciary and construction".¹³

The important laws in this direction are as below:

- 1) **The Dowry Restraint Act: Act No. XXXVI, September 10, 1960.**

The J&K Dowry Restraint Act has been enacted by the state legislature in the year 1960 as the corresponding central law is not applicable to the state. The Act provides for restriction on taking or giving dowry in connection with marriages. The menace of dowry is well known in all states of the country and dowry deaths are common now-a-days. The said law on the subject provides for punishment, imprisonment for one year and fine of rupees 5000 also. The act also provides that a person who at anytime within the three years after the solemnization of marriage demands from the parents of a woman the dowry for his selfishness and thirst for money

would be considered as a crime and must be punished according to the law.¹⁴

The legal system has relatively failed to implement the law in letter and spirit which results in occasional incidents of the dowry deaths. In modern times such customs, usages etc need to be curbed by the society itself than depending on the laws in vogue.

2) **The Panchayat Raj Act: Act No XI of 1989.**

The J&K Panchayat Raj Act had been enacted in the year 1989 and was amended from time to time. In this Act 33.33 per cent reservation has been provided for women at the grass root levels—panchayats and municipalities, so as to ensure their participation in decision making at the lowest level. By providing such reservation, the male domination in decision-making process has been avoided. The aim was to bring women at par with men in all spheres of life and their reservation in the local bodies has ensured speedy justice to women who are victims of domestic violence and deprived of their fundamental rights.¹⁵

Women were benefitted by this Act in 2005 when the elections were held for Srinagar and Jammu Municipal Corporation after a gap of twenty-eight years and for the first time in the light of this Act. Elections for Local-Self Government Institutions could not be conducted in fifteen years after the Act was passed for the State was badly hit by the turmoil. At present, there are 68 and 71 elected representatives in Srinagar and

Jammu Municipal Corporations respectively. There are 45 women members in both the Corporations. However, the elections for Panchayats could not be held for unknown reasons. The National Conference which was in opposition "pressed hard to get the elections for Panchayats done but the PDP-Congress coalition thought otherwise".¹⁶

3) **The Legal Aid Service Authorities Act: Act No XXXIII of 1997**

The J&K Legal Aid Service Act was enacted to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker section in general and women in particular. The objective of this legislation was to restrain begging and trafficking of human beings/ women. It also envisaged grant of legal aid to persons who are victims of mass disaster, ethnic violence, caste, flood, drought, earthquake or industrial disaster. Such legal aid is also provided to the persons whose monthly income does not exceed 1200 rupees. In addition Lok-Adalts have been established to provide opportunities for securing justice ...(are).....or.... not denied to any citizen his/her right on the basis of sex, religion, or any other disabilities and to ensure that the operation of legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunities.¹⁷

4. **The Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act: Act no X of 1999**

The J&K Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act has been enacted as far back in the year 1942 A.D to consolidate and clarify the provision of Muslim law related to suits for

the dissolution of marriage by women married under the Muslim law and to remove doubts to the effect of the renunciation.... of Islam by a married Muslim woman on her marriage time. The said law is based more on the Muslim personal law as well as Shariyat common in Kashmir state. A women is entitled to dissolution of her marriage on various grounds as if her husband is not known for a period of four years, if her husband neglects her or fails to maintain her, if her husband has been imprisoned for more than seven years, if he has been insane for four years or suffering from leprosy, if he was impotent at the time of marriage or a woman has been less than 18 years of age. For violation of the law sufficient punishment has been provided for each case.¹⁸

D. Madri-Meherbaan Women and Child Welfare Institute

As time passed, the National Conference went on its plans and programmes of empowering women. In 1975, the National Conference established a voluntary organization known as "The J&K Markazi Behboodi Khawateen" or "Women/ Children Welfare Trust". "This trust was meant for the welfare and upliftment of women and aimed at providing education, training in the art and crafts, proper health care and social security so that the downtrodden sections of society i.e. women would earn not only respect and status but also become economically independent. Those women who are victims of complete negligence and, thus, marginalized could be brought out of their darkness to light. Once empowered economically, they could

enjoy equal status and be able to protect their rights and secure a respectable place in society".¹⁹

The General Body of the society was framed on 17th July, 1975 and the Executive Committee on 31st July, 1975. Begum Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was elected as its chairperson and this organization was formally inaugurated by late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi in October, 1975. This organization was registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1998 with the following objectives:

1. Imparting intensive training to women-folk in various arts, crafts and social work which could become a source of means for them.
2. Running homes for destitute women and needy orphans.
3. Providing supplementary nutrition to pre-school children residing in slum areas.
4. Providing residential accommodation to working women/ girls coming from rural areas.

At present the organization provides training women in the following arts and crafts:

1. Sozaan Kari (1 ½ year course)
2. Paper-Machie (1 ½ year course)
3. Crewel embroidery (1 year course)
4. Tilla Dogi (1 year course)
5. Cutting and Tailoring.
6. Staple.
7. Carpet weaving.

The women or girls who receive proper training in different arts and crafts either establish their own units or work in others' units and in some cases work at their home. This makes them economically independent and improves their life standards. "With the skill they obtain at this centre, they are able to earn with dignity

and support the livelihood of their families".²⁰ The Centre has provided training to more than 3000 women so far.

In 1979, the Society with the help of the National Conference established a hostel for those girls who come from villages and other far flung areas of the state for job or educational training in any professional course and face a lot of hardships in finding accommodation in Srinagar.²¹

During the year 1981, the Markaz started a printing press with the aid and assistance of All Women's Conference. This unit provides permanent employment to more than 20 destitute women/girls. In 1982, it had started a Consumer's Cooperative Store for the benefit of its inmates, trainees and also for the local population. The store is successfully functioning as District Women's Consumer's Cooperative Society.²²

In addition to this during the period of training, the trainees are being paid a stipend of Rs 300/ month. Besides this all the raw material and training aids needed by them are provided free of cost. After the expiry of the training period, the trainees who acquire proficiency and perfection in their respective craft are allowed to work in the production units where they produce goods for which they are paid sufficient wages.²³

In 1984 this Society established a hostel for Gujjar and Bakarwal women (Schedule Caste/ Schedule Tribe community) with a view to pull their girls out of the darkness/backwardness and educate them properly. This was the first hostel of its kind in the valley as there was no such government or private institutions functioning in the valley till then. The girls in the hostel are provided free education, boarding, lodging, clothing, health care facilities and other day to day

requirements by the organization upto material level.²⁴

In 2000, the chairperson Begum Abdullah died as a result of which the name of the Society was changed to "Madri-Meherbaan Women and Child Welfare Institute", but the objectives of the society remained unchanged. A high level governing body was constituted by the government vide order No. 206-SW of 2000 dated 24.10.2000 for the Society consisting of 16 members headed by the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah and Suraya Abdullah as its vice-chairperson for overseeing the working and streamlining its affairs, besides revising of its activities which were badly effected due to the turmoil in the valley during 1990's.

E. Jammu and Kashmir State Commission for Women

In 1999, another important step was taken up by the National Conference by forming a separate commission for women of the state of Jammu and Kashmir; a statutory body known as the Jammu and Kashmir State Commission for Women. This Commission was brought into existence by state legislature under Act No. V of 1999 and was given the assent of the Governor on 13th April, 1999. This Commission acts as a civil court for women in the state but its procedures and rules are very different from the civil courts. Women who come to commission for help do not need any personal advocate for pleading their case and get help without making any payment for it. Chapter III of the Act deals with the functions of the commission which are as under:

- a) Investigate and examine all matters related to the safeguards provided for women under the constitution and other laws;

- b) present to the government annually and at other such times as the commission may deem fit reports on the working of those safeguards;
- c) make in such reports, recommendations for the effective implementation of those safeguards for improving the condition of women by the state;
- d) review, from time to time, the existing provisions of the constitution of J&K and other law affecting women and recommend amendments there so as to suggest remedial legislative measures to meet any lacunae, inadequacies or shortcomings in such legislations;
- e) take up the cases of violation of the provision of the constitution and other relating women with the appropriate authorities;
- f) looking into complaints andtake... notice of matters relating to:
 - i) deprivation of women's rights;
 - ii) Non-implementation of the laws enacted to protection to the women and also to the objectives of equality and development;
 - iii) Non-compliance of policy decisions, guide lines or instructions aimed at mitigating hardships, ensuring welfare, providing relief to women and to take up issues arising out of such matters with appropriate authorities.
- g) call for special studies or investigations into specific problems or situations arising out

- of discrimination and atrocities against women and identify the constraints so as to recommend strategies for their removal;
- h) undertake promotional and educational research so as to suggest ways of ensuring due representation of women in all the spheres and to identify the factors responsible for impeding their advancement, such as lack of access to housing basic services, inadequate support services and technology for reducing drudgery and occupational health hazards and for increasing their productivity;
- i) participate and advise on planning process of socio-economic development of women;
- j) evaluate the progress of the development of women under the state;
- k) Inspect or cause to be inspected a jail, remand home, women's institutions or other place of custody where women are kept as prisoners or otherwise and take up with the concerned authorities for remedial action, if found necessary;
- l) Fund litigation involving issues affecting a large body of women;
- m) Make periodical reports to the government on any matters pertaining to women and in particular various difficulties under which women toil;
- n) Any other matter which may be referred to it by the government.²⁵

In addition, Jammu and Kashmir State Commission for Women organizes many seminars and discussions every year in every region of the State in order to aware the whole society regarding women

development. The chief administrator of Women's Commission said that they go to the different areas of city as well as far flung areas of the State to make people aware about the importance of women empowerment. Sometimes, "we choose a particular group of men such as doctors, lawyers, police officials, teachers, professors' etc. to educate people how to treat women. We believe that if women have to develop and have to get an equal and respectable place in society, the first and foremost job is to train and prepare men for this very objective".²⁶

**Number of Cases Registered in the State
Commission for Women
(2000-2008)²⁷**

S.No.	Year	Jammu	Kashmir	Ladakh
1.	2000	70	96	55
2.	2001	77	93	45
3.	2002	82	98	39
4.	2003	79	89	48
5.	2004	68	98	25
6.	2005	89	96	36
7.	2006	98	89	55
8.	2007	88	99	45
9.	2008(till May)	30	40	20
10.	Total	681	798	368

According to official record, more than 1800 cases have been registered in SWC in which about 350 cases were solved. Though the commission has a good record of coming to the rescue of people but in absence

of proper infra-structure, funding and human resources, it has failed to come up as a vibrant institution. Since 2003 the commission is without a chair-person and successive governments did not pay any attention to make it fully functional.

Although Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, the former Chief Minister of the State had appointed his wife Shameema Azad as the chairperson in 2005 but that decision drew flak and she did not take up the post. However, the Commission "is struggling for its survival without a chairperson and two members. It is functioning with a consultative committee and the secretary is the alone official managing its affairs".²⁸ It is pertinent to mention here that the National Conference lost power in 2002 and since then the Commission has been suffering governmental apathy.

At the end of the day, one has every reason to conclude that the National Conference has worked for the betterment of the 'disadvantaged and weak link' of the society since its inception. Its efforts haven't gone waste. Women are comparatively in a far better position today. The plans and programmes may not have shown desired results but one must admit that the National Conference has made a sound beginning after all empowerment, in its true colour, is *not* an overnight process. It took Europe and developed nations centuries to reach to present state of affair. There is still a long way to go. And one should also not lose the sight of the recent developments of Kashmir history (since 1990) which have given birth to new problems like disproportionate increase in number of widows, Half-widows, conflict related physical disorders, mental distress and the problem of orphans. These new challenges need a joint venture of civil society and political leadership so that problem is uprooted at the earliest.

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Conclusion

The earlier chapters have shown that women in India in early Vedic periods had enjoyed an equal status to men. They had a say in social life and were respected by the whole society. In education and other fields of life as discussed earlier women participated equally and were not considered inferior to their male counterparts. Same was the position of Kashmiri women in earlier periods. In fact in no other region of India did women enjoy such type of freedom, equality and respect as in Kashmir. But since the dawn of foreign rule, the position of women began to deteriorate to such an extent that when Jammu and Kashmir came under Dogra rule, they had accepted their secondary/ degraded position as their destiny.

But with the British influence both in India and Jammu and Kashmir, they began to think about their degraded status and some consciousness came in to their minds and tried to reform their position. However, freedom struggle both in India and Kashmir became the cause also for freedom struggle for women. It gave them platforms to come out of darkness and raise voice against foreign rulers as well as against their position as second class citizens. As a result, with the independence in India and Jammu and Kashmir measures for reforming the conditions of women were started by local governments. In Jammu and Kashmir

National Conference became the first government headed by Shiekh Mohammad Abdullah provided many opportunities for development of women. It made many laws, established many institutions/ commissions, as discussed earlier, and took initiatives for women empowerment but the goal has not been achieved yet. Women participation particularly in decision-making processes is very low. That is why National Conference intends to give 50% reservation to women in decision-making processes from grass-root levels to the State Assembly. (in a personal interview with Mr Abdul Rehman Rather). The National Conference being out of power and acting as a leading opposing party in government also tried to make such laws and other schemes which will be beneficial to women. This is proved by recently passed Bill known as Muslim Personal Law Sharia't application Act of 2007. The Bill was introduced by senior opposing leader of National Conference Mr. A.R. Rather in the Assembly. This Act will bring a revolution in the whole society particularly in rural areas. The very Act is very beneficial to women as under this act the right to Inheritance is ensured to them. Now it is legally an obligation on part of parents to give their daughters the right to inheritance. The said Act will ensure women's economic security so that at any bad times, they can face the challenges of life. This is really an appreciable Act introduced by National Conference. Therefore, it can be said without any doubt that National Conference since its very beginning has been consistently worked for women's empowerment—Social, Political and Economic. It is the party which has provided more and more opportunities to the women to contribute a lot to the society. The credit to aware women about their rights

and status in society really goes to National Conference but it failed in empowering women in all fields particularly in Politics partly because of the male-dominated society as Jammu and Kashmir is and partly because of the bad circumstances prevailing in the State since 1989. Women still are facing many new problems resulting from Kashmir conflict and changing outlook of the whole society.

Jammu and Kashmir is a state where one in three people suffer from neurological disorders and one in five women is a victim of domestic violence; the state has not any great track record in giving women representation in the Legislature, at least in the last 20 years that it has been rocked by militancy and aspirations for freedom (Azadi). In the state there are parties where women leaders hardly have a presence, leave alone a voice, in the state today. Talking to Business line about her difficulty in finding and fielding woman candidates, Ms. Mufti said: "I would love to have as many woman candidates as possible, because I do believe that thanks to their gender, women politicians are better equipped to empathize with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have undergone a lot of suffering and have had to give a lot of sacrifices. But in situations where it is difficult to find even good men to come forward and contest—they demand security which we can hardly promise—it is a little too much to expect women to rise above their role in such a traumatized society and come forward to participate in the political process." By and large, this is the explanation almost all parties have to offer: the dearth of women politicians who have risen from the grassroots and come forth to participate in the political process. (Rasheeda Bhagat: Women Get Short Shrift in J&K Polls, Business Line,

September 12, 2002.) The National Conference has produced some great women politicians such as Begum Abdullah, Mrs. Mehmooda Ali Shah, Mrs. Zainab Begum, Mrs. Khemlata Wakhloo, Smt. Gurbachan Kumari Rana, Smt. Iqbal Kour, Smt. Depinder Kour, Mrs. Zaffar Ali, Ms Sakina Itoo and Shameema Firdous.

But it is a recognized fact that for development of a true democratic society, human resource development is a must. Human resource development implies that women also need to be developed right from the grass-root level especially in the areas of education, health, employment, economic welfare and attainment of social and psychological security. Besides they need to be involved in the total decision-making process right from the home up to the parliament. Women in decision-making and national levels are major change factors which are leading towards greater participation democracy, social equality and gender justice.

Empowerment of women is a need of hour. It will enhance both the quality and quantity of human resources with which development is possible. Thus, if any nation has to develop women empowerment is must. But empowerment of women and their equal status etc are not so easy to put in to practice. Any improvement in the status of women is almost impossible without cooperation and change of hearts from the part of men. Men must be involved in this process. Otherwise it would become like clap with one hand which is impossible. On the other hand, it is also necessary to arise self-consciousness and awareness in each individual woman. For achieving this objective awareness of gender discrimination challenging the sense of inferiority, recognizing the value of their labour and their contribution to the society and

conscientisation is much important. The role of women should not be underestimated. They can work wonders if given a chance. They have constructed bridges and not walls during conflicts in the family or outside. However, attaining of education is pre-requisite priority for their overall development. Teaching/learning material must be designed in such a way that would render gender gap and foster and prepare women for equal partnership and shared roles for a common future. However, mere education will not empower them unless it is integrated with economic activities and skill-development to ensure their employability, income generation, self-help. Thus, the skill based job-oriented income generating vocational courses in various crafts/ trade as per their need would certainly empower women in distress and despair and bring her out from pauperizing state of affairs. There is no need for much intervention and innovations to empower women. What is needed is orientation, mobilization and realization of women friendly environment. Only the women living in the cities and one or two towns have benefited by the reform movement so far. Same is the case in Jammu and Kashmir. Only the women belonging to elite class have been benefited by government schemes/ programmes particularly in political field. The new spirit must travel to the farthest corners and arouse the humblest and poorest in the land. It is the peasant women who constitute the backbone of the community and who have to be awakened and led on the path of progress if nation is to grow and prosper.

The state has a fundamental role to play in the implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

and ensuring that State Human Rights commission pay adequate attention to violation of women's rights. State policy can promote and ensure the equal participation of women in decision making in all forums. A gender inclusive policy and the integration of a gender perspective into training programmes of bodies addressing gender issues would ensure greater effective of prosecutors, judges and other officials addressing and handling issues of violence against women in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Afterword

Women in Kashmir have been held in high esteem and enjoy comparatively a better position than their counterparts in the rest of the Indian sub-continent. Culturally they have had a dignified status and politically they exercised their 'powers' being the Queens and sometimes as the rulers of the Society. Women did contribute not only within the domestic spheres but in Art, Poetry, Music and even politics as we had many women involved in the governance during the indigenous rule in Ancient Kashmir. As the Kashmir went in foreign hands, the 'beauty' of Kashmir became its first casualty. The Autocratic rulers had all evil designs for Kashmiris in general and women in particular and they never missed any opportunity to exercise their lustful hands. This shameful situation pushed the women to a dark corner and they were compelled by the circumstances to embrace 'uncleanliness' to safeguard their chastity. This sorry state of affair proved too costly to the society which had seen a great contribution from its women in the Past.

As the women started fighting for their rights in the other parts of the world and some countries like United Kingdom gave political rights to women, the Kashmiri women had yet to set their feet outside the four walls of home not from the fear of the men-folk of the society but for autocratic political regime had denied

them the very basic right—right to dignified life. They had no rights at all. Society, at large, was suffering from mass illiteracy, unemployment, forced labour, meager wages and the worst of all was the political oppression. Kashmiri society particularly Muslims faced utmost tyranny at the hands of Autocratic rulers. In this dark-age, Sher-i-Kashmir Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah emerged as an organized resistance against such tyrannical practices. It was under his dynamic leadership and visionary politics that Kashmiris asserted themselves and articulated their legitimate and democratic demands which were regularly ignored and brutally crushed. Realizing the peoples' aspirations and future needs of the State, the National Conference came out with a revolutionary policy document "Naya Kashmir Manifesto". This document is a unique of its kind in the history of Indian sub-continent for having a separate charters on every class and section of society particularly women. Since its adoption in 1944, the National Conference has religiously followed the Naya Kashmir Programme.

Sher-i-Kashmir Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah had a deep desire to empower the women and he encouraged women to come out of the slumber in which they were forcibly pushed into and join the men in freedom movement launched against the autocratic Dogra rule. His sincere efforts bore fruits when some brave women joined the National Conference in this national cause. Gradually, women started flowing in and it turned out in a great movement which later on made the track smooth for the future generations. That is what makes the National Conference *more than* a political party. Sheikh Saheb whole-heartedly wanted to see every

male and female of the State of Jammu and Kashmir as literate and he made education right from the primary to university levels absolutely free. Let facts alone speak for it as even today [in the age of privatization] most people look toward the government schools for the education of their wards particularly in the rural Kashmir and the all the National Conference governments have efficiently worked in this direction. He had a particular vision not only of a literate family but of a healthy family as well which is reflected in Article 52 of the Naya Kashmir Programme and the policies of the National Conference Governments subsequently pursued on.

No one should lose perhaps the equally important factor of women emancipation—the role and contribution of Madre-Meherban. This shall be no exaggeration of the facts that she is an “iconic” figure which continues to inspire the women of Kashmir to live a ‘dignified’, ‘honoured’, ‘emancipated’ and ‘rightful’ life. The way she fought a legitimate battle for the rights of Kashmiris and the way she guided the people, in general, and Kashmiri Leadership, in particular, both during Sher-i-Kashmir’s time and also after his departure from this world, will continue to inspire the forthcoming generations of Kashmir. Her tireless efforts for women emancipation are known to one and all. She shared the miseries of the Kashmiri women and thought of a fruit-yielding and viable institutional solution at her own by setting up a “Trust” known as “The Jammu and Kashmir Markazi Behboodi Khawateen” [Women Welfare Trust] which was inaugurated by Late Smt. Indira Gandhi in October 1975 and since then it has benefitted thousands of families. Besides imparting training in different arts and crafts like “Sozaan Kari”, “Paper-Machie”,

cutting and tailoring, carpet weaving etc., the Trust operates a girls hostel for working/professional ladies, special hostel for Gujjar and Bakerwal girls where no charges are levied for education, boarding, lodging, clothing and health-care and an orphanage called *Gulzar-i-Itfal*. The trust is expanding its activities for the benefit of the Kashmir society. I think new challenges have cropped up particularly during the last two decades and the Trust may take an initiative, which is a must, in the near future to rehabilitate the victims of the insurgency.

Efforts have not been individualistic alone rather institutional as well. The National Conference has provided “space”, which all liberal feminists look for, to women at all levels. There are Women Wings operating alongside all party units whether at district levels or at the central level. Such an atmosphere has been created so that maximum number of our women become part of the decision making processes not only within the party but in the government as well. The women wing is emerging as an influential decision making pocket within the party and is duly considered for the direct participation by encouraging them to contest elections. Though the number is still less, the presence of women in the State Legislature is all but a positive sign for an inclusive and sustainable development of the State in future. Our encouragement and sphere is not confined to State Legislature alone rather equal focus is paid on their participation in the Local bodies. Today we see a good number of women in different professions like Health, Education, and Policy-making etc. only because of undisputed contribution of the national Conference policies and programmes and the painstaking efforts of Sher-i-Kashmir and Madre-Meherban. Something

meaningful has been achieved and lot more needs to be done. The journey is not over. We have made a sound beginning despite all the restraints and oppositions and let us keep the candle burning till we reach to our goal which we envisioned in our Naya Kashmir.

Co-incidentally, as the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir are overwhelmed to celebrate the 104th Birth Anniversary of Sher-i-Kashmir Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, I am involved in writing an afterword to a comprehensive and objective account of a book focusing on the formation of National Conference and particularly its role in the women empowerment. It is equally rejoicing moment for me for the Author is a young female scholar of barely 25 years of age and has spent almost three years in research for this book. For no sufficient academic attention was paid towards this crucial aspect, I look to this book as a good beginning. I could discover this book very comprehensive, well-written, conceptually enriching, properly contextualised and honestly analysed. It is a timely addition to the social science literature on Kashmir.



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- 5) Mr. Ali Muhammad Naik: Former Parliament Member (MP) and Senior Leader of National Conference.
- 6) Mr. Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din Fazili: Contemporary of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah and a Freedom Fighter.
- 7) Mr. Mehraj-ud-Din Bhat: Project Manager, Madri-I-Meharban Women and Child Welfare Institute, Srinagar.
- 8) Mr. Muhammad Ishaq Qadri: Former Advocate General.
- 9) Mr. Muhammad Yusuf Teng: Former Director General Cultural Academy and Senior Member of National Conference.
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